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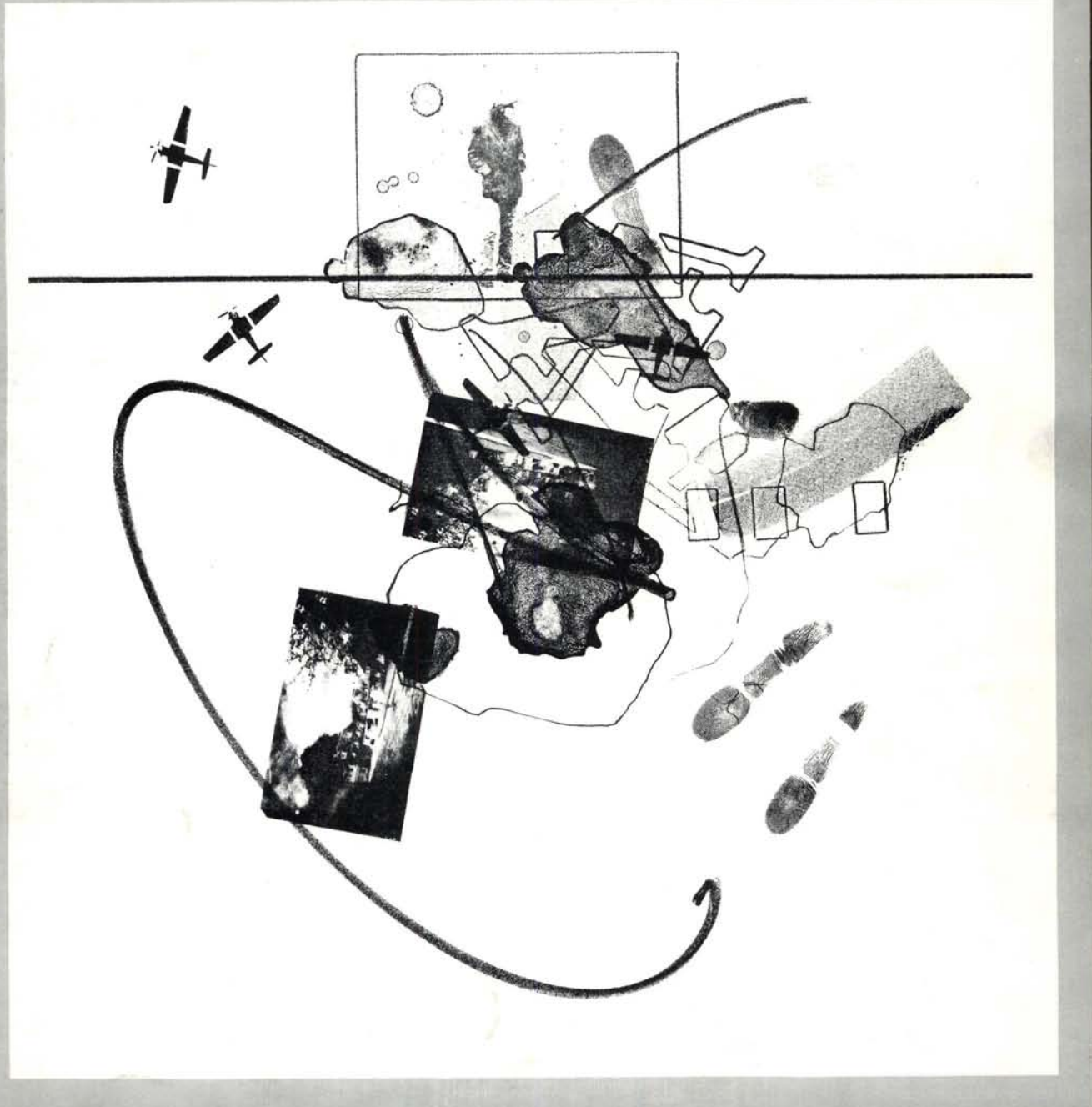

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Wild Should Wild Remain.

"Man always kills the thing he loves, and so we the pioneers have killed our wilderness. Some say we had to. Be that as it may, I am glad I shall never be young without wild country to be young in."

ALDO LEOPOLD

"Integrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe. Love that, not man apart from that...."

ROBINSON JEFFERS

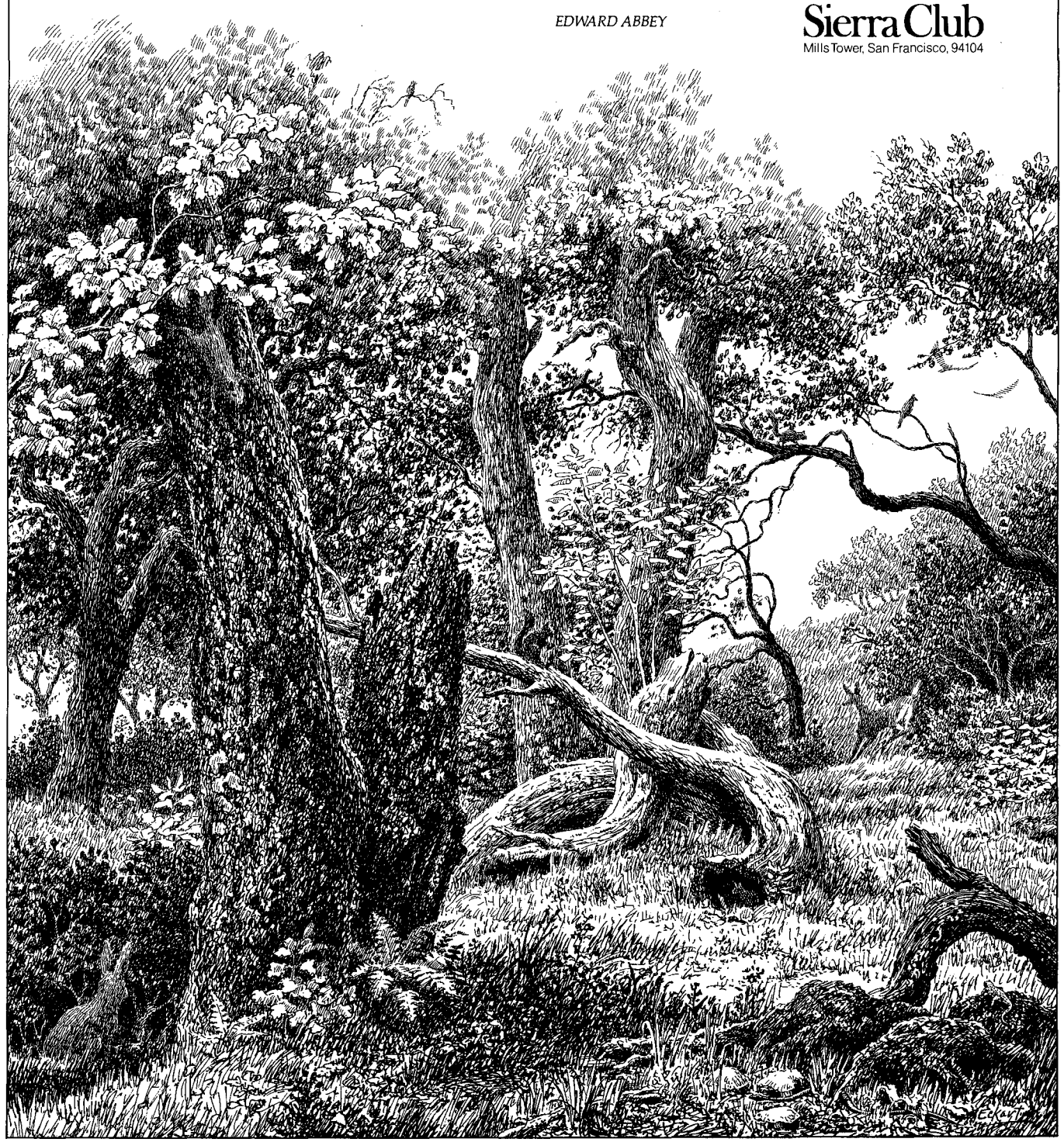
"The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, (the earth which bore us and sustains us), the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need—if only we had the eyes to see."

EDWARD ABBEY

"We need wilderness preserved—as much of it as is still left, and as many kinds... It is important to us... simply because it is there—important, that is, simply as an idea."

WALLACE STEGNER

Sierra Club
Mills Tower, San Francisco, 94104



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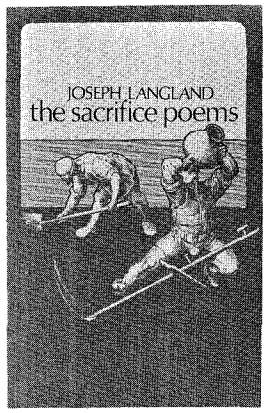

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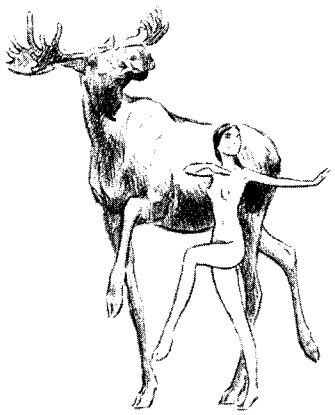

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The North American Review

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R. H. Abbott

The Bite: A Narrative

The evening breeze was cooler than usual; flowing across the grassland from the Northwest, it brought a breath of air to the stifling little reservation village of Corn Creek.

The first days of July had been hot on the Dakota prairie. At the state capital, Pierre, a temperature of 112 degrees was reported on July 2nd—the highest in the nation for that day. There was little or no activity in Corn Creek except for the movement of a few Indians dragging their bedding from the tiny shacks and tents into the cool night air.

Leon Roubideaux lay alone on a ragged mattress near the door of his log cabin home, now much too hot to sleep in. The cabin was encircled by the remains of a barbed wire fence, much of it torn up and scattered on the ground. The wire on the posts had come unfastened a long time before and now it sagged until it touched the ground. Adorning the yard was a clutter of old tires, paper bags full of trash, assorted auto parts, a transmission, tie rods. In a narrow driveway near the house sat an old blue pick-up truck on blocks, the wheels long since removed and the body rusting out. Leon hadn't used the truck in nearly a year.

This evening Roubideaux was alone—his wife and two children had gone to Soldiers Creek ten miles away to stay a few days with her half brother, Jake Eagle Elk. His wife had decided on leaving after the night Leon came in drunk, waving his .38 police revolver at her; the gun had been issued to him when he was signed up as a part-time special tribal police officer, his only employment recently. Still wearing his uniform, barely able to stand, he had come crashing through the door, damn near breaking it in. Then he gave out with a fury of curses and drew his revolver. His wife didn't wait around to find out what it all meant—anyway she had seen it enough times before to know—but grabbed up their two small children and left to stay with her family in another part of the village. The next day she decided to go on to Soldiers Creek to stay away awhile longer. Serve him right.

Roubideaux wasn't thinking much about any of what had happened; besides, he couldn't remember much of what went on between himself and his woman, except he knew she was gone when he woke up a couple of mornings ago and hadn't come back yet. There was not much more to it than that in his mind. But he figured she'd be around again soon, in a day or two, or whenever it was she got over what was bothering her.

Meantime he had spent the hot day drinking beer up near the creek where it was cooler and some of the other men in town had been getting together the past couple of days.

Lying sprawled on his mattress looking up into the clear star-filled sky, Roubideaux dwarfed the double-sized mattress, big man that he was. His body seemed to spill out over the whole mattress when he was relaxing like he was then. His feet hung over the end of the mattress. He was a good 6′ 4″ tall and weighed at least 245 lbs. He had big, coarse features and a heavy beard that was almost black. That was somewhat unusual for a Sioux Indian, most of whom have little or no facial hair, but then he was only about half Indian—the rest was French blood, his grandfather on his father's side having come down from Canada and marrying a Sioux girl who probably was not a full blood either. It got pretty complicated after a while on reservations, especially when you understood that the less white blood you had the more true Indian you were thought to be. So it was not unusual for Leon and a good many others on the reservation to exaggerate the amount of Indian blood they really had in them in order to be that much more acceptable. Everybody in Corn Creek knew, or said they knew, that Leon wasn't more than half Indian. And it could have been he had no more than quarter Indian in him. At any rate he had a heavy beard like a whiteman. His greasy black hair was pushed back along the side of his head in the DA style cut common in the 1950's but still seen fairly often on the reservations nowadays. He had not shaved in several days and he showed it.

He was still feeling high from the case of beer he had consumed since early that morning, but the coolness of the night air felt good to him and for an hour or more he slept, dozing lightly and conscious of the brightness of the star-filled heaven. Later he slept more soundly—perhaps a little drugged by the beer he'd been drinking and the relief he found there from the day's scorching heat.

* * *

Clearly it was pain he sensed while still asleep, but more annoying than painful at first, and then a scratching scuffling sound on the mattress beside him. He knew he wasn't dreaming as the pain—which he now located as being in the fleshy part of his neck near his windpipe—had sharpened and was getting worse. He came awake immediately now and struggled to his feet, sure something was biting him but unable to think what animal would come after him asleep on a mattress, out in the open and not that far from the bright lights on the end of his street. All he could think of was a rat, but that didn't make much sense—rats always ran away, unless they were cornered and that was damn hard to do to a rat. And they didn't go out looking for someone to bite. Leastwise, he was fairly sure they didn't.

Whatever it was that had him, had him good and secure on the neck and he could feel blood running down the front of him. He could now see the animal somewhat better—it was small and biting and scratching the hell out of his neck and shoulder. He could see patches of white on the dark form, struggling as he was to free himself

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from the jaws locked on the fleshy part of his neck. He was standing now, still half-befuddled from the beer, trying to pry this animal off his neck while it struggled against him as if he were its natural enemy.

Even with the advantage of surprise the crazy animal could not long stay attached to Leon's neck, not once he got his powerful hands around it. Still, the little animal fought with all the ferocity of a big cat and finally, as Leon got a good hold on it, it let fly with its most effective and most recognizable defense—a foul-smelling spray, an unbelievable stench that made a man want to turn over his insides, especially when close to the source as Leon was then. The smell told him immediately what had hold of his neck—there was no mistaking it, and he thought back to days as a boy when he and a dog crossed paths with a skunk and were fool enough to stay around to see what would happen next.

He couldn't ever remember hearing of a skunk that would attack a man, unprovoked, and especially in such a fashion as to bite him on the neck. Skunks just didn't bite—except this one was biting, and biting like hell.

After a few minutes of jumping around with the wild scratching animal still on him, Leon managed to pull it off his neck, but along with the skunk came a fairly large chunk of flesh. He didn't feel it at the time, but when he saw the raw meat that was his neck still in the locked jaws of the skunk his anger got worse. Even as the animal was torn away it tried to bite again and secure itself on another part of his neck or shoulder, but this time he was much too quick for it, and in one motion Leon wrung the skunk's neck and threw the animal to the ground, stomping on it several times with his heavy boots until he was convinced it was dead. Finally, still angry and disgusted, he kicked it in the direction of some paperbags filled with beer cans and other trash.

He stood quietly for a moment with the blood still flowing down his front from the open wound on his neck. He was trying to decide what was more unbearable, the wound on his neck or the God-awful stench from the skunk spray. By now he was completely sober but still a little puzzled as to why a skunk would take it in his mind to attack him for no reason. Such fury from a skunk he had never seen the likes of, but he figured it was just a mean skunk and left it at that. He had heard of foxes and skunks and other animals getting mean that way sometimes, but he had never seen it for himself the way he had this night.

He decided at last to strip off his clothing. He threw it out beyond the fallen-down barbed wire fence. He was beginning to gag from the stench of the skunk; the clothes could lie there until they rotted, for all he cared. He searched around the yard for a bucket to wash off as best he could the awful smelling skunk piss. He had forgotten for the moment the bite on his neck, though it was still bleeding and open and raw looking. A sure bet to get infected if he didn't get proper care.

* * *

It wasn't until the next morning and his wife's return to the terrible smelling house and yard—with the skunk still lying dead among a heap of trash—that Leon thought much more about what happened. Of course his neck pained him a good deal by morning and the stink wouldn't allow him for a minute to forget what had gone on the night before. Still, when his wife got there he didn't have much to say about what had happened in her absence, except to explain how a loco polecat had gone after him and bit him and that he had killed the animal and thrown it in with the trash.

His wife didn't see too much that was important to her in what had happened, and if Leon wasn't talking much about it she knew better than to ask; it would only cause trouble. She had learned not to ask much—certainly a lot worse stuff had gone on when she wasn't there except they had to do something about that awful smell. Leon never mentioned just where the skunk had bitten him, probably figuring his wife could see the wound on his neck plain enough and only a dummy wouldn't know enough to figure the skunk had bitten him there—especially just after he got through telling her a skunk had bitten him and he had killed it. But the obvious wasn't so obvious to her. Of course she saw the raw wound of Leon's neck and she even thought of offering to dress it for him, but he didn't seem to want that so she kept silent. She guessed the skunk bit him on the hand or somewhere else she hadn't bothered to notice. After all, how would a skunk bite a man on the neck unless he jumped in the air four or five feet? And everyone knows skunks with their short legs and stout bodies aren't doing much high jumping—not at a man's throat, leastwise, and not when the man is as tall as Leon. And who ever heard of a skunk taking a big hunk of flesh off a man's neck? It was too crazy to happen that way. She had figured he got the wound in a fight he probably didn't remember because he was too drunk—like he was most of the time. Probably a little ashamed of himself, too, she guessed. She had heard plenty about the fights he had been in and didn't need any telling of the details of another one—so she didn't ask.

While Leon headed off in the direction of the creek to drink some more beer that day—the insufferable heat was still upon them, baking the already powder-dry prairie—his wife cleaned up as best she knew how, trying pretty unsuccessfully to neutralize the foul skunk smell. The heat and the pile of clothes Leon left in the road and the dead skunk in the heap of trash around the cabin didn't do much to improve the air in that part of town. She picked up the smelly clothes from the road and carefully laid them in a cardboard box. She then moved toward the carcass of the dead skunk, watching it a little suspiciously—as if it might still be half alive and ready to turn on her with a last burst of spray. But the skunk was quite dead and already rotting in the ninety-degree sun. She turned away gagging as she stooped to pick up the little animal. Watching her were two children who had stopped by the gate; they held their noses against the wretched stench. With skunk and clothing in the cardboard box, Leon's wife walked about a hundred yards to the edge of a dried-out creek bottom about thirty or forty feet deep. Over the years it got used as a town dump and was now more than half filled with all kinds of trash, mostly cans and bottles and paper. For about a hundred feet before the edge of the creek bottom there were boxes and papers and beer cans strewn all over, left by those too lazy to walk the entire distance to the edge of the creek and throw the trash in. On windy days the trash would get blown all over town and out onto the prairie on the far side of town. It was a mess, but no one seemed to care very much.

* * *

Leon hadn't been working much lately—that was the reason for his week of almost continuous drinking—so when the gray government car pulled into the yard a couple of days after his battle with the skunk he thought it had to be someone from the Bureau of

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Indian Affairs police to see if he were available for some kind of special police duty—maybe keeping order at one of the many summer powwows going on at that time. He felt terrible; his neck was swollen and hurt him something awful, and his wife told him it looked infected. By this time she had learned the skunk had caused the neck wound and she tried to tell Leon to go into the reservation hospital at Redridge. She knew what a bite from a wild animal gone crazy meant—rabies. But Leon wouldn't go and he got mean every time she brought it up. He was hung over and a little drunk already that morning from beer. He hadn't shaved since he got bitten because of the pain in his neck which seemed to have spread somewhat to the sides of his face. So he didn't look very presentable to the occupants of the government car that had pulled into the drive.

His wife opened the cabin door and peeked out shyly to get a look at the two men in the car. They were dressed in the tan summer uniforms she had seen the doctors at the Redridge Hospital wear. These were Public Health Service doctors who maintain the government-run reservation hospitals at Redridge and other Indian reservations in the west.

One of the two men was tall and lean and boyish looking in his horn-rimmed glasses and short blond hair. The other man was shorter and older and a good deal heavier. The way the tall man followed the older made it apparent who was in charge.

The older man had dark hair graying a little. He spoke first as he approached the cabin door held ajar by Leon's wife.

"Is Leon at home?" he wanted to know, already looking uncomfortable and awkward, as he usually did when he made these visits to Indian homes, particularly in the back country villages like Corn Creek. He was always acutely aware of the penetrating cold looks of the Indian people. It was a different kind of response to a doctor; in most parts of the country a doctor commands a certain respect for his work, but the response at times on the reservation was queer and took some adjusting to. That was about how he summed it up after two years out here: he never felt very much appreciated, much less welcomed by the Indian people.

The purpose of his visit was simple enough, although it might turn out to be anything but simple before he was finished. There was a story going around the reservation about a man who got bitten on the neck by a skunk while sleeping out in the open on a hot night. Those kinds of stories had a way of getting around fast, and since no one had been into the hospital to report such an unusual incident, the director of the hospital decided more had to be known, so the doctor was given Leon's name and asked to investigate. After hearing the details of a man getting attacked by a skunk for no reason at all, he knew right away the animal had to be rabid; he also knew after his years on the reservation that there was no certainty the victim would come in for treatment.

Probably if it weren't for the fact that it was a skunk that attacked and not some other animal, and that the smell Roubideaux carried around with him for a couple of days made people ask what happened, and that he in turn had to explain how some crazy skunk had bitten him in the neck, the story might not have gotten back to the hospital staff. If the victim didn't think it worth the trouble to come in for attention, he would almost certainly die, and that meant to the hospital that all hell would break out. The Public Health Service would be accused of neglecting the health of the Indian people by allowing such a thing go unnoticed; probably the Public Health staff would be accused of not properly innoculating stray dogs against rabies. And of course it wouldn't matter much that it was a skunk that carried the rabies and that the man hadn't come in for treatment. He had seen this sort of thing happen before, not on his reservation but on nearby reservations in South Dakota—on Pine Ridge Reservation, for one.

* * *

The senior doctor—Dr. Thistle—knew Leon Roubideaux and called out to him as he entered the little cabin. Dr. Regan, a new man who was completing his internship at Redridge, hung back somewhat; he felt a bit shy, afraid he might do or say something wrong. Leon's wife— a squat, heavy woman, late in pregnancy—hushed up the two children and didn't seem to pay much notice to what was being said. Instead, she whispered to the children, who were carefully watching the two uniformed doctors dressed like no one they had ever seen before.

"Leon, what's this we hear about a skunk biting you on the neck, and why in hell didn't you come in to see us?" Thistle said this in a tone of voice that did not indicate anger and Leon knew this right away. It was the doctor's way of saying, *I'm concerned for you and I'm put out when you don't take advantage of my services.*

Looking a little sheepish, and feeling foolish for having stayed away from the hospital, Leon said, "The bite is sure hurting me plenty today, Doctor."

Thistle moved closer to Leon to get a look at the badly swollen and infected wound. It needed cleaning up in a bad way—as did Leon, he thought, getting a whiff of perspiration and beer, the beer seeming to have a slight edge over the body odor.

"This is a bad cut, Leon—dirty and infected and getting worse.

"Look here, Dr. Regan," The other man moved closer and nodded his head, saying, "Yes, that's a bad infection."

"I want you to come to the hospital with me right away so I can clean up this wound— do something about the infection, too, and I want to talk with you about something else we've got to do." Thistle decided to explain about the rabies treatment a little later. One thing at a time, he thought. "By the way, what did you do with the skunk? I've got to have it."

"I didn't do nothing with it. It's out by the trash, I guess. But what in hell do you want with a dead smelly skunk?"

"I've got to check it for rabies."

"Rabies, huh? You think that crazy skunk had rabies, do you? He ain't got them now. He's nothing but dead now—that worthless critter, mean as anything I've come across in a long time."

No, he ain't got them now; you have, the doctor thought as he started toward the door, figuring to look in the trash pile for the skunk carcass.

"I want to check out the skunk," Thistle said. "It's important, or else I wouldn't go looking for an old dead skunk lying in the hot sun for two days. You can bet on that."

Leon's wife interrupted, speaking softly a few words in Indian.

Leon turned to Thistle and said, "You know, we might just have to do some real hunting to find that damn skunk. My wife threw it over the creek bank out back of the house. It's in with some of my clothes in a cardboard box. No telling where it landed."

Thistle frowned as he thought of having to pick through the dump out

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back looking for a skunk. Then he remembered Regan was with him. It's a dirty trick, he thought, but it's got to be done. Dr. Regan would get to do the first of his non-medical chores on the reservation and probably the worst thing he would be asked to do during his two years or so on the reservation—picking through beer cans and other trash in 90-degree heat in search of a two day old dead skunk.

So Regan was sent to rummage around the dump while Mrs. Roubideaux stood on the bank directing him in the general area where she remembered throwing the box. And Thistle in the meantime cleaned up the wound on Leon's neck and began to explain what it meant to have the rabies treatment and how without this treatment a victim would almost certainly die in a short period of time, and how dying of rabies was a terrible thing to see.

Leon listened quietly, and when Dr. Regan returned soiled and not in very good humor—but with the skunk in the cardboard box—the three of them left for the hospital at Redridge, fifteen miles east of Corn Creek.

* * *

The skunk was examined and, sure enough, had rabies. Several of the doctors explained over and over again what Leon must do. They told him what it was like to get rabies and how a person dies. They showed him pictures to make it all the more convincing. Dr. Thistle even arranged to have an Indian employee of the hospital explain everything in Lakota so there would be no possibility of a misunderstanding—even though Leon probably understood English better than Lakota. There was to be no misunderstanding as to what was required; Dr. Thistle and the director of the hospital wanted everything perfectly understood.

There was a problem, however. The treatment could not be done at the Public Health Hospital at Redridge but was to be handled in Winner, a community approximately 40 miles east of Redridge. The Public Health facility contracted with the Winner hospital for certain services, including rabies treatments, so Leon was to make twice weekly trips to Winner, South Dakota, for his treatments—21 in all.

After the third or fourth visit Leon missed a treatment and the Winner hospital was on the phone wanting to know where he was and what he was thinking of by not showing up. Dr. Thistle took the call and confessed he certainly didn't know what had happened. He was sure Leon knew the importance of having treatments on time; no, there was no doubt he understood. In fact, he did—but Leon was having other problems. For one thing, he hadn't worked since being bitten by the skunk and was broke most of the time, even though the tribe owed him pay going back several months. For another he was drinking more than ever now, especially since he didn't have much to do with his time.

Dr. Regan was sent to his house at Corn Creek, only to learn from his wife that he was drinking somewhere. She didn't know where, and Regan soon discovered she had problems of her own and no time to worry too much about Leon. She had just delivered a baby boy at home, all alone and with no one helping her. When asked where Leon was when she went into labor, she replied that he had been asleep in the other room and she didn't want to bother him.

The day after his missed appointment in Winner, Leon was found and brought in to the Public Health Hospital in the tribal ambulance; he was sick, but mostly he was hung over. He listened to Dr. Thistle, who was in no mood to be kindly.

"For Christ's sake, you can't just go to those treatments whenever you're in the neighborhood. You've got to go every time—not just some of the time, but *every* time. You understand?"

Leon sat quietly for a moment and then said, "You know, getting over to Winner is kind of hard for me to do a lot of weeks. Last three times I had to pay someone six dollars for gas to take me over there and home again. I don't have that money, so I decided not to go anymore. I ain't working none now, so I can't pay that money. That's all."

"Holy Christ, Leon, I'd walk if I was in your place and my life depended on it. And your life does depend on it, I want to remind you. But if it's the money for car fare that's keeping you away, we'll get it here from some fund or other. But if I give you this money every time you go, you better get yourself over there. I don't want to see you spend the money on something else."

"I ain't walking no fifty miles or more," Leon replied, thinking of what the doctor had said about getting there at all costs, even if he had to walk. "But if you give me the gas money each time, I won't have no trouble getting there."

"OK, Leon, I'll get you the money from now on, but please don't think I'm just trying to scare you or something when I tell you you'll die if you don't go for the treatment. Today we'll send you to Winner in the tribal ambulance to be sure the inoculation gets done right away, but I want you to do something about getting a ride yourself after today. And yes, I'll see that you get the gas money every time."

Leon nodded that it was okay with him and he understood perfectly. Thistle picked up the phone and ordered the tribal ambulance, which soon arrived in front of the hospital to pick up Leon and take him to the Winner Hospital. As Thistle watched the ambulance climb the hill going east toward Winner, he wondered whether Leon would indeed get himself organized enough to see through this treatment program without constant reminding and chasing around after him.

As it turned out, Dr. Thistle's fears were not without substance; the following week, for the second time, Leon did not keep his appointment in Winner and the hospital was on the phone again wanting to know what kind of nut this guy really was. Yet the day before he had been in to get the six dollars for car fare, promising he would go to the hospital.

Dr. Regan was again sent out to Corn Creek to find Leon and bring him in, but Leon was not at home and was supposed to have left the reservation with some friends headed toward Cody, Nebraska. He was finally located the next day and carried off to Winner in the tribal ambulance, drunk and nearly unconscious, to get his next inoculation in the series. The next time was the same, and the time after that, until it became a regular thing for a Public Health doctor and the ambulance driver to go looking for Leon. He still came in on time for his six dollars gas money and always promised to use it for car fare the next day.

Things went on this way the entire time he was being treated in Winner. Once the tribal ambulance even went as far as Kadoka, South Dakota, 60 miles away, to pick up Leon after he couldn't be found and it was reported he had gone to Kadoka to get some ranch work. This time he was found

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drunk in the Silver Spur Bar in downtown Kadoka. He was returned to the reservation in the ambulance as usual. Finally, the inoculation series was finished; finally Leon Roubideaux's life was saved.

* * *

Leon completed the inoculations, mostly because he was not given the opportunity to miss the treatments, but later Dr. Thistle sat down and went over in his mind the costs involved in saving this one Indian's life. There was the ambulance and the driver (which were desperately needed for other services), the doctor who usually went along to look for Leon, the treatments in Winner, the money advanced Leon for car fare, and the special expenses involved in chasing off to some place like Kadoka to find him and bring him back to the reservation area. It had to total up to several thousand dollars, he figured.

The government could have put Leon on the payroll during the period of his treatment and paid him a good week's pay with his only responsibility being to report to the Winner Hospital each time he was scheduled for an inoculation. It probably would have worked out better—Leon would have had a job and been busy and maybe less often drunk—and there no doubt would have been a cash savings. But the doctor knew nothing could be that simple, nor was it a very realistic idea. They did things the best way they could under the circumstances, and under a fairly specific set of regulations. Their options were few—they could have explained everything to Leon, as they did, and if he didn't have the good sense to follow through they could have said the hell with him and let him die. Under ordinary circumstances no one would have held them accountable for the acitivities of a man who showed no more common sense than Leon. But "ordinary" circumstances were not what they worked under.

If they *had* allowed Leon to go off on his own and die—as he almost certainly would have—the press and the high officials in Public Health in Washington would have roasted them. They would have been told what they had already learned: no expense or trouble or inconvenience (even when other innocents suffer because of it) is too much when weighed against the alternative—the ugly publicity and bad press almost sure to follow in the wake of an incident in which a person who just happens to be an American Indian dies of rabies for want of treatment. If it were pointed out that every effort to help the man was made but he was uncooperative, they still would have been held accountable, for their responsibility was to act even when the patient didn't have the intelligence or good sense to do so himself; Indians, as wards of the Federal government, required particular attention in this area.

In a way this made good sense to Dr. Thistle, although he had not yet heard it put that way by the Public Health Service personnel. It was always *avoid trouble and ugly incidents at all costs*, with no mention of such other considerations as the doctors' responsibility to treat people like Leon even when the people themselves didn't care. But Leon lives today, he thought, and that was the most important matter—although he wondered, as he did in so many other cases on the reservation, what was he saving them for: a life of alcoholism, a life which wasn't going to be very long the way local Indians put away the sauce? *That* he didn't know; but he and the others had done their job with Leon—and maybe even a little more. □

JERALD BULLIS

DECORUM

I won't be rich with lust
In amaranthine ragweed
Come fifty Mays—still

I walk about these dark places, attentive
To paths that come and go, that
Are older and younger than me;

And the night shuts down,
As the night shuts down,
On the facts of tomorrow.

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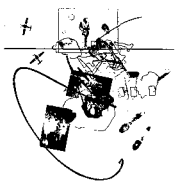

Civia Cohen Tamarkin

India

That first night I still expected to find the boatman. Sitar and Indian drum music followed us into the street from the ground-floor restaurant in Old Delhi's Hotel President. We crossed Asaf Ali Road to catch a taxi, maneuvering between the light rope-strung frame beds which lined the concrete island of the thoroughfare. It was early evening, but for a city that sleepwalks through thick-aired daylight there is no reason to wait for full darkness. Sidewalk squatters fixed their lean-to dormitories, bits of canvas and plastic bags sloping against buildings or the low stone fencewalls that rope off a park. The British set out to build a spacious capital in Delhi, succeeding with sprawling parklands, fountains, and round-a-bout parkways. But civic ordinance prohibits sleeping in the parks.

Three boney men stood waiting to use the open urinal affixed to the broken bricks of the corner building. Beside them hooded Hindu women collected their children. A barefooted barechested pilgrim rested crosslegged on the pavement, the red mark of Vishnu smeared on his brow. I was looking at faces, trying to meet the stares, for India was only hours old and I believed in the mystery behind a muslim veil and in the dark deep-set eyes of a turbaned Sikh. Poverty accosts you throughout Asia, but on the subcontinent it is laced with exotica. It is not the westernized poverty of Indochina measured against consumer goods. India's poor are plucked from the eons of the past and in their time-halting looks there is the sense of returning to a secret source.

We drove back to the new city along the tree-lined central vista of Rajpath. A few yards from the street a man squatted in an open area, his white *dhoti* pulled around his waist, his buttocks brushing the grass of a public lawn. Inside the fenced hedge of a circle parkway, a society of cows reclined in a flowerbed. My companion sighed, drawing a fatigued look. He said it was a Hindu virtue to suffer with repose.

On Thursday the first monsoon came, cracking five days of 110 degree heat, and the next morning New Delhi began to move again in rainwashed freshness. From the distance of the wide residential avenues, you found the elegance of British rule and along the route to the India Gate the hulking redstone government mansions stood with authority. A large support rally for the prime minister was scheduled for 10 a.m. at the Boat Club, the wide lagooned parade grounds beside Parliament. Trucks draped in green and orange and white bunting spilled into the capital, bringing people from neighboring states. Special trains brought people from the south.

Easing through the crowds, I watched the carnival busyness of the rally. Under gay canopies vendors sold *chappati* and thin rolled slices of *paratha*. Gandhi-hatted workers manned ice-water stands, dispensing free drinks with the compliments of the prime minister's Congress Party. Cold drinking water sells for five paise a glass on the streets of New Delhi. Two days later, I would find Anand, the skinny postal clerk who recited the preamble to the U.S. constitution and told the story of George Washington and the cherry tree, bidding for friendship by offering to buy me a glass of water, as we sat in front of the Supreme Court where Mrs. Gandhi was filing her petition for an unconditional stay on the Allahabad judgment. I would tell Anand I wasn't thirsty.

Behind the wooden barriers closing off the rally site, opposition groups passed out handbills and shouted hate slogans toward the podium where Indira Gandhi was to speak. Their protests were blurred background noise against the sounds of 200,000 supporters swarming inside the parade grounds. People bathed fully clothed in the new rain-filled water of fountains, women lifting their sari skirts to splash between their legs. The mud banks beside the reflection pools oozed orange and yellow under my sandals and gushed between my toes, rising over my feet in a quick-drying ankle-high cast. Men stood behind single plywood screens urinating into the ground. Urine ran into the wet grass, running together with the mud and the overflowing pool waters.

After spending four months in Asia, I looked forward to something familiar about India. Something connecting. Like a language bond. Or ideas lifted from books. But in the swollen crowd I suddenly felt conspicuous. Chanting was coming from the podium and I stopped a man to ask him what it meant. We sat on the ground on his homespun cotton shawl while he spoke devotedly of Mrs. Gandhi and I felt fixed to the edge of the cloth by hundreds of warring black eyes. The closeness to India was uncomfortable. Smells of spiced rice and dung swallowed the air. Later, I washed my hair three times. Threw out my sandals. Scrubbed my feet, feeling they would never get clean.

(The outspoken Indian dailies carried the story that the rally was organized by the Prime Minister's son Sanjay, with the Congress Party mobilizing the people by promising free water and free sleeping space on the soccer field.)

* * *

On the day the Allahabad High Court found Indira Gandhi guilty of corrupt campaign practices, I was on a Malaysian train talking to a Hindu woman who was sharing my table in the dining car. "Indira Gandhi is aboveboard and the only one who is honest," she said. "The dishonest ones are those bringing the charges against her."And throughout the trial proceedings, everyone else felt the same way, viewing Mrs. Gandhi as she indeed viewed herself—as a legendary heroine championing the defense against unwarranted abuse. War-weary western journalists, fresh from the collapse of Indochina, converged like cheerleaders on a new trouble spot. Fully aware of the Prime Minister's liking for power and the corruption within her administration and Congress Party, the western press had nevertheless been sympathetic to Indira

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Gandhi over the years. Like Golda Meir, she had that particular brand of motherly charisma that conjures up trust.

India had staved off its own Watergate. Talk outside the Supreme Court was of Nixon and democracy. Shouts of "Democracy lives" sprang from the crowd of Indians who had stood a vigil for days on behalf of democracy's test, as a recalled vacationing justice censured the Prime Minster by declaring a conditional stay. As I lingered in front of the court gates, a delicate man wearing dark glasses offered his opinion. "Indira Gandhi will not part with power easily. She was well prepared for this verdict," he said, noting that the night before, on the eve of the ruling, the Prime Minister had dismissed the Home Secretary, a top administrative post patterned after the British system, replacing him with one of her own supporters. The man continued: "She will never abide by the ruling. Under the constitution she has the power to call a state of emergency and dismiss Parliament entirely." I thought his speculation unlikely at the time. Such action would be a desperate move, unbecoming a leader who enjoyed such a massive following.

I met Anand at the Old Delhi post office on a narrow lane in the midst of the fruit and vegetable market. He had invited me to see the old city and he led me through the bazaars, through the teeming streets, pausing to catch the smells of an open shop and to marvel at the blacksmith's craft. A cow chewed on the vegetables from a merchant's basket. Squadrons of beggars hovered around the door of a restaurant while an aproned proprietor tossed out bowls of scraps. We walked to the Red Fort, the mile-long walls of red sandstone. Anand boasted of the history of the fortress, clocking details as we purchased a ticket and entered the arcade of shops and soft-drink stands. Once the emperor's private bazaar. Anand was excited. He hadn't been inside the fort for years, since it is too expensive for Indians to pay the entrance fee. On the far side of the central courtyard, beneath the flat roof of the Hall of Public Audience, old men molded stone chips to replace the raped jewels from the mosaic designs on the great marble walls. Their exposed arms, their white khadi shirts were coated with plaster dust and their faces had a matted finish that made them look like clay people, sculptures before the details are etched into the features. They all looked alike—all the fineness of distinction hidden by the cement.

Anand smoked a cheap smelling cigarette and said that democracy wasn't working in India. Everyone was better off under the British. He asked me what *socialism* meant. At 2:30 a.m. the next morning, a seventy-two year old statesman and scores of other opposition politicans were arrested in a pre-dawn raid that gave Anand and others like him some answers.

Because Mrs. Gandhi had given her assurance that citizen's rights would be protected under the emergency, most Indians initially believed the situation was temporary and the country awaited the return to normalcy—meanwhile the government was busy shaping reforms and issuing guidelines that would preclude any reversals. But on the surface the fabric of daily life remained visibly unchanged. One-horse *ekka* carts and legions of bicycles leisurely ambled along the wide manicured streets of New Delhi, their passengers seemingly unconcerned over the scores of police

troops assembled in the square at Connaught Place and strategically dotting the curbside down Janpath Street. Beyond the Ajeri and Delhi gates, in the winding back-alley mazes of Old Delhi, merchants and buyers spilled into cloth and silver stalls of Chandi Chowk market and crowds languished in the cloister about the massive front court of Jama Masjid, apparently undaunted by agents of the Central Intelligence Department who patrolled the area in Muslim garb, ferreting out opposition critics. On the outskirts of New Delhi a literate person was totally ignorant of the government's action which affected his daily life, and in the six hundred eighty thousand mud and straw villages scattered over India's countryside, people attended to the chores of crude farming life unaware of the emergency—and not caring.

The immediate impact of the emergency action was felt by local and foreign journalists, who were distributed mimeographed guidelines "for the press in the present emergency." Within hours of the announcement, a censors board was set up in the External Affairs Division of the Ministry of Information, and formerly cooperative bureaucrats suddenly became alien to newsmen. Those bureaucrats who were reluctant to enforce censorship, such as I.J. Gural, the Minister of Information, were immediately replaced by Mrs. Gandhi. The swift preparation of controls and the sudden transformation of India's fledgling democracy left dazed disbelievers. In a matter of weeks, an estimated three to five thousand political opponents were arrested, two Bombay journalists were jailed for not sending stories through the censors, and foreign journalists were required to sign a pledge promising to abide by the censorship. A few stateside publishers cabled protests to the Indian Embassy in Washington, receiving a reply from Ambassador T.N. Kaul that "all laws concerning precensorship flow from the constitution and are the law of the land." Several correspondents were expelled when they refused to sign the pledge and others were ordered out by nervous editors who feared for their safety, since foreigners were also subject to arrest without legal recourse under an amendment to India's Maintenance Internal Security Act.

As changes occurred from minute to minute, India came to bear the indelible mark of a police state, unleashing suspicion and tension in educated circles and among government employees who feared arrest over the least provocation. Anand wouldn't return my phone messages. Cab drivers no longer talked about a friend or relative in New Jersey or New York. Additional censors were hired to monitor mail while journalists and citizens, many of whom claimed no political party affiliation, found their phones tapped.

By declaring a state of emergency Mrs. Gandhi was ostensibly trying to prevent the internal threat of a widespread conspiracy; however, her action was seemingly prompted by the more deeply rooted intent to tighten the slack in India's economy and to make good on her unfulfilled 1971 campaign promise "To Abolish Poverty". A few weeks after she launched the emergency, Mrs. Gandhi sat behind the large C-shaped teak desk in the panelled office of the Prime Minister and confidently told a Western observer, "The emergency was declared to save the country from disruption and collapse, but it also enabled us to put though an economic program." Though some observers believe the opposition

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never had strong support (without constructive alternatives to Mrs. Gandhi's policies their hyperbolic criticisms seemed little more than personal vendettas), Indira Gandhi could not risk anarchy, and with an election year ahead of her she did not have time to coddle dissent. Known as a woman who enjoys power, she needed to deliver on the promises that led to her sweeping populist election if she was to maintain her position. Now, however, the elections for this year have been cancelled.

For days I went to the hotel newsstand asking for *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *Herald Tribune* and the baffled owner kept making excuses. He didn't know why his stock was not delivered. I was swallowed by India, cut off from the rest of the world. The only substantial section left in the Indian newspapers was the matrimonial advertisements. Outside the window, a family of five was napping in the late afternoon shadows of a building. Where were all the people who had talked of nothing but democracy a few days ago? There was nothing but calm throughout the city of Delhi. No word of protests coming from other states. Perhaps that was the difference between a democracy and a country that only pretended to be one.

But it was understandable that many quarters of Indian society responded favorably to the sudden loss of democracy, for Mrs. Gandhi's economic package had token gifts for everyone: Industrialists were told there would be no futher nationalization; the *Harijans* were promised land parcels and favorable borrowing terms; the middle class received tax exemptions; and for everyone there were lower prices on basic foodgrain commodities and edible oils. A crackdown on blackmarketeers and hoarders assured further price reductions, and in some cases the price of items such as rice and cloth reportedly dropped as much as twenty-five per cent. The Prime Minister was clearly able to continue her chameleon-like shuttle between India's various interest groups. Still . . . where was the middle class, the journalists, intellectuals, literati and artists who were previously the most vocal critics of Mrs. Gandhi's failing policies?

If any group had a vested interest in the status quo, it was the middle class, for they were the ones who had benefitted over the years from the little economic progress India had made since independence. Newspaper publishers understandably went along with the censorship because the major papers were owned by industrialists who were given favors under Mrs. Gandhi's economic program. While individual editors and journalists balked over the censor guidelines, most of the rank and file union members complied, squeamish over the prospect of losing jobs. The situation caused a rift in the previously relaxed and cordial labor-management relations. On a bulletin board in the Hindustan *Times*, for example, the employees' union posted a brief telegram to management: "Request not publish anything which will lead to unpleasant situation adversely affecting jobs of employees. All such [matters] will be resolutely fought back by union." Such a telegram declaring an ultimatum was rare. When one was forthcoming, management was always aware of it. "I don't understand it," an assistant editor said. "We [the union leaders and editors] are friends and normally we would have discussed the matter over tea. I suspect the government may be behind the action."

Even the bureaucrats who were uncomfortable with the state of emergency were reluctant to speak out because of economic reasons. In a country where jobs are scarce and more than fifty per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, earning an annual per capita income of less than one hundred dollars, civil employees feared the loss of their positions as well as the loss of the much cherished free-housing benefit. Last year, Mrs. Gandhi adroitly ended a strike by workers on India's nationalized railroads by threatening the loss of government provided housing. There was also no protest to the emergency among India's middle class military ranks, because the armed forces have traditionally been apolitical and the newly appointed Chief-of-Staff was hand-picked by Mrs. Gandhi. Moreover, the officer élite sit and drink in exclusive clubs as the British officers did in the 19th century, having little to do with the lower ranks.

For the most part, the middle class preferred to take a wait-and-see attitude toward the emergency action. Although the lower middle class shopkeepers were bearing the brunt of the stringent measures and were cowed by the police into maintaining price controls, the bulk of India's six hundred million masses seemed to be benefitting by the lower prices and the availability of goods. "Now that people have greater buying-power, they feel that democracy is functioning. A more liberal system was not working for them," commented one merchant. I listened to him, wondering how you stop price haggling after two thousand years.

A maharaja and his family sat in the comfortable living room of the townhouse. They were Englishmen in every sense, brown sahibs educated at Oxford, sporting the lilting voice of Richard Burton reading the Old Testament. The oldest son kept dabbing at his nose and fluffing a handkerchief that ruffled from his watchband. A pile of Parker Brothers games was on the coffeetable. The maharaja and his son had just finished a game of Tiddleywinks . . . I had never really seen anyone play Tiddleywinks before, much less expect a maharaja to be absorbed by it. The state of emergency never entered the conversation. The son talked about his women's readywear line and the father chided Abraham, an old army cook, about not mixing the right amount of Fresca in the drinks. All my questions were shrugged away and finally, before beginning a rousing bout of *Jeopardy*, the maharaja said, "How do you expect to teach democracy or any other 'ism' to people who believe all they need is one bath a year in the Ganges?" There are more British in India than in England.

Once unanimously supportive of Mrs. Gandhi, India's intellectuals have been polarized in loyalty since the Prime Minister failed to implement her 1971 election promises, a fact made obvious by their split reactions to the emergency situation. In New Delhi, a group of authors and publishers signed a petition endorsing Mrs. Gandhi, the leading signatory being Amirita Pritam, the titular head of a segment of India's artistic community. Wearing white slacks and a print tunic blouse, the flamboyant fifty-six year old woman sat cross-legged on the bed, surrounded by hard-cover works of Henry Miller, Sartre, and Castaneda. Her young painter protégé served warm glasses of lemon tea and she quoted from one of her own poems: "Democracy gives license to abuse grow-

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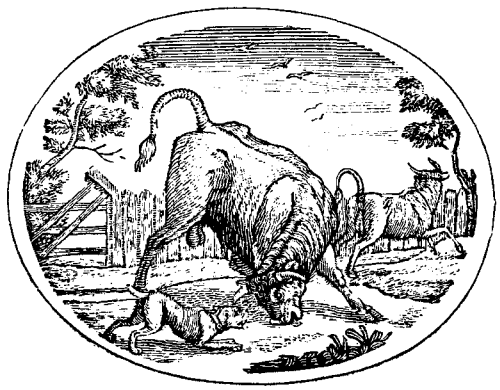
ing in abundance." Admitting that she was gambling on the means to an end, Ms. Pritam said, "Freedom must be sacrificed at present to establish a more perfect democracy for the future." Many other intellectuals also agreed that they would forego their passion for intellectual freedom on behalf of widespread social justice. Nevertheless, they faced the dilemma of oppposing censorship while endorsing Mrs. Gandhi's economic program; as one political writer notes, "One can only protest the entire policy; you can't support the economic efforts and refute the censorship."

One middle-aged poet slumped in his chair, fixing me with a dispassionate stare and drinking short sips of whiskey. "I only hope we do not become frustrated drunkards like the Russian authors," he said, remaining motionless, his slight frame swallowed up by the size of the furniture and room. As he spoke, his fingers gripped the edge of the armrest. "For me this is the worst kind of life. Without foreign magazines and newspapers my days are empty . . . I can't live without links to the west." He began talking about the ineffectiveness of protest poetry, lapsing into a discussion of "Art for Art's Sake," but it was a hollow monologue. As though he were fumbling to recall someone else's ideas or to memorize strange lines, the quiet empty words were unconvincing coming from a man whose writing was influenced by Allen Ginsberg and the '60s. One of India's leading contemporary poets, he was known for the strength of his angry verse which passionately called for social change, warning the public against being seduced by India's diseased political machinery. Yet, in the wake of the emergency the poet maintained an enigmatic silence, a bewildering position for someone who once said that no intellectual can remain a witness to political negations.

"The situation may be temporary," said the poet. "Besides, I need time to re-evaluate my views. Personally, I believe in absolute democracy. Anyone has the right to kill me and I have the right to go to court to have him hanged. But my kind of idealism means nothing to people who don't feel they get an equal share."

Like most of India's educated middle-class, the poet had been brought up on western notions of democracy. But his definitions are not applicable in India. While he spoke, the hotel lobby began filling with an early evening crowd and two men sat down behind the poet. His discomfort was obvious as he toyed with a button on his shirt. Casually, he got up and moved to a couch in the corner of the room. Speaking in halting whispers he seemed to echo the futility and paralysis of the characters in his own poems. "As a citizen of India I am trying to understand what is best for the country. As a poet, I am filled with despair, for as a poet I have a larger world vision—I believe that India is doomed."

While not sharing such a pessimistic view, most of India's intelligentsia did believe that the country was hurtling down a slippery slope and what was needed was a braking device, a self-correcting mechanism. Yet, they conceived of one within the existing framework, perhaps in the form of a bourgeois revolution that could push through radical economic changes. But with no cohesion among opposition parties and with no emerging strong leader to unite them, such a revolution was impossible.



But the state of emergency did appear to have jolted India's lethargy in its cumbersome government machinery and in its stalled economic programs. An authority body aptly called the Central Vigilance Commission was responsible for scores of demotions and dismissals among civil employees and there was a marked improvement in efficiency. The trains were running on time. Mr. Sood, a small-scale civil clerk who came to offer information for the price of tea and cab fare, pushed up the dark glasses he sported on a thin nose and said that there was a tin curtain around India, but after three years of requests there was now a water cooler in his office.

* * *

I watched the cab drivers strip to their shorts and shower in the morning drizzle. Yesterday, a friend told me that he had been to the Taj Mahal and while standing on the balcony looking down at the River Jamuna he had seen women offering the corpses of their dead babies while hungry mobs of dogs plunged into the water after the sacrificial bundles. It is impossible to understand the irreconcilable contradictions that are India. I find myself becoming more conservative, more reactionary through my western eyes, wanting to shake a beggarwoman and cure her of the lingering malady of colonialism while I shout Horatio Algerisms. How long can a country continue as a "developing nation"? India is already defined as Fourth World by western economists. The country boasts of its cultural legacy, but refuses to feed itself. The per capita food intake is fifty per cent less than in Western Europe. The Pesticide Association of India estimates that eighteen per cent of the total annual food-crop ouput is lost due to pests, diseases, and weed infestation. In Uttar Pradesh, the largest of India's twenty-two states, there are six hundred million rats consuming enough food to feed one hundred million people each year. Half of the two hundred and fifty million sacred cows are unfit for use on farms, yet they roam through the country accounting for the wastage of foodgrains and fodder.

Western economists say that India's economic development policy for the last twenty-five years has failed because of misguided priorities and misallocations of capital and natural resources—the country's industry makes everything from zippers to automobiles. Many Indians believed such stringent measures as the emergency were necessary. "We, as a nation," said one journalist, "have always wished to eat our cake and have it. Worse, we still believe that this is possible. We aspire to obtain the best of all possible solutions with the least of all possible sacrifices."

Still, I doubted whether any amount of sacrifice or control could save India. I had stopped at the village of Ajijpur, just sixty miles north of New Delhi, mid-way along the slow two-lane highway that leads from the urban capital to the great

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white marble Taj Mahal. To the people of this crude farming community, politics and government have no meaning in their daily lives. They have lived the same way for generations, using primitive implements and clinging to the ancient tribal customs of their ancestors.

Less than ten per cent of the twelve hundred villagers have gotten past the fifth grade and no more than three can speak English, despite the fact that they live in the shadow of Delhi. There are no newspapers and word travels by word of mouth. A few people have transistor radios—their only link to the outside world—given by Family Planning groups to men who have consented to vasectomies.

From a distance, the entire village looked like a jagged rise on a parched eroded landscape. Most of the dwellings were one-room huts made from a mixture of clay, straw, and cow dung—a few were thatched conical straw huts. A hard rain could wash all of them away overnight. I walked through the narrow mud corridors of Ajijpur: skinny children—semi-nude, pockmarked, scarred, malnourished—romped about, their bare feet sloshing through the droppings of the sacred cows and oxen. Flies swarmed in the waste and clung to running sores on infants' bodies and landed on anything else in sight. The stench of human waste permeated the air along the gutterless streets formed by shovels scooped through clay.

There was one well for the entire village, from which the villagers drank and bathed. I passed women carrying on their heads oval pottery jars filled with water, their faces veiled, their skin tattooed with intricate designs. Beads hung around their necks and bangles dangled from their arms. The village carpenter was making furniture with crude early century tools. A woman sat on a doorstep, rocking back and forth, hand-spinning yarn for weaving. A camel plodded along, pulling a load of fresh-cropped hay. The people were friendly, warm and curious at the light-skinned stranger who had come to visit. They circled me, smiling through broken betel-stained teeth and reached out to touch my arms and hair. The entire village looked like it was made by children playing in a clay pit one day. But the village was not a figment of a child's imagination. It was the home of twelve hundred Indians and it is likely to be their children's home as well.

* * *

For a brief period, the lively debates that had once characterized India's colorful and outspoken Lok Sabba sessions were again echoing through the rotunda chambers. "This Parliament is meeting in a different India," shouted opposition member Erismo Sequerra, poking his finger through the air.

It was an ironic scene as opposition members, representing splintered parties that for so many years had tried to uproot India's democracy, were now clinging to its last vestiges. Playing to a handful of British diplomats and foreign press in the balcony, representatives quoted from books and journals during Parliament's special monsoon session, called to ratify India's state of emergency.

Dressed in a dark silk sari, Mrs. Gandhi spoke slowly and deliberately, saying that each person must search his own heart for the meaning of democracy. But nobody had a clear idea of what democracy was all about. There were no philosophical or historical debates or soul-searching about what went wrong, only charges and counter-charges between the opposition and Mrs. Gandhi's supporters. It appeared that the opposition existed only for the sake of contradiction, while the majority was a rubber-stamp for the Prime Minister. From the gallery it seemed as if India had been clinging to a legacy the British left behind without fully understanding why—aping, in a fashion, what was thought to be the civilized way.

"The founding fathers wanted India to be a sovereign democratic republic. They were very clear on their intentions," pleaded P.G. Mavlanka, an Independent. "They never meant the emergency powers to destroy the democratic foundation of India."

"What is the point of having a toy sword?" Mrs. Gandhi replied. Two days later, India's democracy officially ended. Perhaps the action came twenty-five years too late.

I boarded a plane feeling I was returning to civilization. I was glad to be leaving everything I had at first so anxiously wanted to be part of. I gulped down glasses of fresh milk, the first in weeks, and pored over back copies of newspapers and magazines. Not only did I want to find out about the world with the hungry curiosity of a child who has just learned to read, but I wanted to know what was happening in India—what had been happening around me that I had been censored from seeing—what had been open to others in their own isolationism. I returned to Indochina, bereft of enlightenment, dreams, and the two thousand year old secrets of life. □

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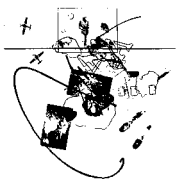

Kenneth Lash

Sweet Violence

I hate violence. I can't tolerate it. Which is, yes, a violent reaction.

That's the central problem of violence—both parties have to share in it, whether or not only one instigates it. That's the degrading part—the forced intrusion of another person's design into my life, an intrusion I am given no opportunity to avoid, no chance to escape, and no psychological ability to withstand, i.e., "forget."

Simone Weil defined the violence of power as that force which turns a person into a thing. Both the user and the subject.

As in limp bodies carried off the football field, effects calculated on the face of a Woody Hayes. At original levels, like the master-slave relationships. X times a day I bend to your will (which I don't like), or you bend to mine (which is more like it). We are born to this willfulness, and so to the stirrings of cruelty (victory) and frustration (defeat).

I am told that life consists in choosing sides (freedom) or being chosen by them (slavery). My problem is that my life's Choice of All Choices wasn't made by me: I was inescapably born onto my side. And I'm the only one on it. I try to strengthen the position by pretending it's a team. I keep my head down by burrowing in among likes—friends, colleagues, beliefs like me. My "choices."

Against yours, damn you. How I'd like to grind your nose in the dust!

But I can't, I'm too puny. Besides, the cops won't let me. Also I dreamed the other night that I loved you. It's impossible. I wish I had a secret ray gun. We'd see which side came out on top, and *fast*.

Of course RCA and CBS and ABC have a kind of secret ray gun.

* * *

Picking a side is what television watching is all about. Picking a side is where violence begins. And my side better be on there, damn you, whether I'm a cartoon kid, crying wife, gorilla-brow, or angel-haired conservationist. And you better see that I get enough of my side, any day or night, because it's like money and different people need different amounts.

I have to watch pro football because it's a goddam marvel what they can do but the point is I get to pick my side to *win*, I choose and I can choose again, as much or as differently as I want, and keep choosing and hammering for it to turn out my way, and it will if somebody doesn't screw up. I watch the Bunkers because I want them to lose, the silly bastards, both generations. They're the kind of people you make up one of those armies for Napoleon out of—the army he forgets somewhere. Most of all I have to watch the bloody detective shows, because they're the only ones I can really

count on. The good guys are going to win and that's that. No need to get uptight: the bad guys are going to get the shit shot out of them. It's relaxing.

Sure I know it's hypnosis, and that's a big problem with TV, but it's not the profound problem. Hypnosis is absence; profound problems are presence. What keeps clawing and scratching at my rest while I'm watching these programs is a pair of questions, one of which I can't calm: In watching these programs am I, as it's called, vicariously experiencing violence and so "getting it off" harmlessly, in the air? Or am I in fact being *injected* with violence? having more of it fed into me . . . perhaps digestible only by some later form of actualizing it? Is the view of life so crazymirror distorted, so powerfully projected as dream-of-Right at one end of a gun and dream-of-Wrong at the other that I inescapably *believe* it? *Have to* absorb it because I let it into my body through my eyes? If so, only some of it? Much? A lot? Something in my stomach insists there are too many rotten people in "Baretta." The proportion is wrong so nothing else can be right, and the mixture is sickening.

* * *

Literally. The theory of catharsis says that watching tragedy is good for you. Intellectually and *physically*. Naturally flowing wastes of fear are flushed; the physical defeat (death) of the human is converted to spiritual victory by the alchemy of human courage becoming nobility in the face of unwanted but inevitable conflict. Blah blah. The process (heroism) not the product (defeat) is the greater meaning.

But on TV the product lives: the process is dead—an implausible formula impossibly extended. Its central aim is acceptance, sprung loose from belief, freed from reality. As for normalcy, don't ask: *Everybody's* a nut on these shows. Streets, seas, and sundecks full of kooks, kinks, cons, slammers punchers knifers gunners shots sheriffs torches, psychotics sweet sour and pickled—why, a plain old vampire is so square he's a figure of fun. Or she is.

And how about *my* side? Mirror opposites, is all. Same problems ploys and hustles. My boys: nobility shown as he prepares to screw with soul (white faces making Aunt Jemima eyes); or prepares not to screw because of soul (the glazed look from Trail of the Lonesome Pine); or killing to protect the innocent (clean-cut Calley, the good kid in a rotten racket); or killing to punish the guilty (J. Edgar Hoover gone to Denmark and returned as Charles Bronson); or killing because you're cute but you just can't help it, something went wrong back there with Mommy (highbrow, "a cut above," so to speak). . . .

Ech.

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There's hardly a person in the whole TV zoo whose life is in any way handsome enough, vital enough, beneficial enough to make his or her subtraction from it meaningful. Who cares. Nobody. We hate 'em all, even the winners. Like rooting for the Philadelphia Flyers, an armed band that ought to fall through the ice and drown in cream cheese.

Is it any different at the movies? No, it is not any different at the movies, Charlie. There are five theaters in my neighborhood. The paper shows me these choices: "Hustle" (Burt Reynolds holding a gun, shirt open to centerfold bellybutton); "3 Days of the Condor" (3 men holding sawed-off somethings, fully-dressed in black, with the replica of a U.S. half-dollar plugged between them, the face of which features what we American kids used to call a French kiss; "Conduct Unbecoming" (back and backass view of naked lady crouched before lower third of man in military officer's boots with sheathed sword hanging down alongside; "Killer Force" (held over 4th week showing Telly Savalas with big revolver backed by small other appurtenances like helicopters, Mercedes-Benz, people with dark glasses); and "The Hindenburg" (exploding in mid-air, throwing stuff around like a volcano, and in the lower left-hand corner, a square-jawed inset of George C. Scott, determined to discover who lit up when the no-smoking sign was clearly on). That's my choice. Plus Triple X minicinemas (you can go alone and still be happy) and Triple X drive-ins (come as you are).

Or I can read the newspaper: "School teacher Mary Lombardi, who shot and killed her 18-year-old son as he was being treated for a drug overdose, will be released from prison Feb. 19. The Ohio Adult Parole Authority has granted Mrs. Lombardi, 45, a release on parole from the Ohio Reformatory for Women at Marysville. Mrs. Lombardi was sentenced to 4-to-25 years for the slaying of her son, Joseph. He was semiconscious on a stretcher in a hospital emergency room when he was shot six times last Apr. 25. The Columbus school teacher's sentence was commuted by the governor to a term of 1-to-10 years."

—Des Moines *Register*, Jan. 16, 1976

Choose your side:

- ☐ Serves him right.
- ☐ Semiconscious is good enough.
- ☐ A good teacher is hard to find.
- ☐ Parole is a humane advance.
- ☐ A merciful governor is hard to find.
- ☐ It was *her* son, wasn't it?
- ☐ Think I'll read that again, I must have missed something.

The Big Free Lunch, the newspaper is, the television set is. All the violence you can eat. If you're a gourmet, go to the serious writers currently practicing. A salad of Gunter Grass? a nice fresh Didion? Capote sanglante? With most of our best writers it's a violence of view, persisting so, so insistent, as to fall finally to a dead seriousness. Who *wants* to read them? Aside from the young, maybe, and their teachers? For many of the rest of us it's an obligation, largely postponed until we can "get around to it." Get around to being able to bear it, more likely.

Finally, you need no longer simply read or not read, watch or not watch, violence. You can have the real thing, day or night, on your own street, in any city, town, or hamlet in the country. Violence has leaped out into the open—no more closet stuff—and its face is the face of you and me and our children.

Where did it suddenly come from? everybody asks. It came from where it always was, inside us. Bottled up by social force, released upon the sanctioned occasions—wars, crusades. Until now, absolute violence wasn't available to the common man. Only kings, countries, generals, and police had it to command. Now anybody can have it. It is as if all that the human being's unique grudge against life needed was the loosened social situation in which to express it, and the proper technology to destroy on the scale of his dreamings.

And his myth-makers are, as usual, available—the gurus and glamorizers, the "leaders," transforming to airy gossamer all that is most cheap, self-romanticizing, and eternally vicious in our being—the chuckle at destruction. The poisonous heroics of battle against living.

Ah hell, why not? Life isn't what it ought to be, eh Arch? Too goddam much them and not enough us. Come to that, too much you, not enough me. Drives sensitive folk mad, don't it? and the insensitive to stampede. One thing, anyway: the suicide rate among women is up 45%. That's because they haven't got equal opportunity yet in crime, THE upwardly mobile profession. Remember when a gun was called an equalizer? Now it's a piece. What it does is, it wastes. Dig? Like, Justice is blind, OK?

Violence is a blind man with a gun.

Christ, what a sweet bird flies up when he pulls away at the trigger! ☐

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

One thing about violence, brutishness—that all-in-all disrespect for humanity we hope this number of the NAR touches upon and genuinely deplores—is that they have become institutions. Thus structured and accommodated in our culture, as war or a defense budget, as a presidency espousing the death penalty, as a television season, as any official willingness to meet human preference with physical nay-saying, violence of all sorts and degrees becomes both thinkable and—God help us—tolerable. A couple of recent studies add: *fearable*. Not only do we find ourselves increasingly insulated against feeling the plight of others, we see ourselves made more timid by the implied threats our culture glorifies. Where—in this election circus year—is the politics of kindness?

Notes on new books published by past contributors to the NAR—often including work that first appeared here: Raymond Carver's *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please* (McGraw-Hill); Gail Godwin's *Dream Children* (Knopf); Stephen Dobyns's *Saratoga Longshot* (Atheneum); Norma Klein's *Girls Turn Wives* (Simon & Schuster); Rosellen Brown's *Autobiography of My Mother* (Doubleday); Raymond Federman's *Take It or Leave It* (Fiction Collective); David Evans's *Train Windows* (Ohio University); Russell Edson's *The Intuitive Journey* (Harper & Row); Joyce Carol Oates's *Crossing the Border* (Vanguard); Dennis Schmitz's *Goodwill, Inc.* (Viking), and Peter Wild's *Chihuahua* (Doubleday). Northern Illinois University Press has published *Heartland II*, an anthology of Midwest poets, many of whose names are familiar to NAR readers. And the cover of the anniversary edition of Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* (Houghton Mifflin) was designed by Roy R. Behrens, whose graphic skills are regularly displayed in the NAR and a number of other periodicals.

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D.C. BERRY

NOTE

That old stare is back
in the 3-legged chair
I sit in and stare out of,
wondering when the whole
thing will fold

and I'll floor
the rug so hard with my head
the sound will be louder
than the pow
of a pistol's mouth.

The old stare back,
chair braced
like a center in 3-point stance
over the ball,
groggy: eeney meeney miney mo,

uncertain what the quarterback
will call, the ball
be released, the lineman
dance and fall.
I've sat here a week,

have done this before,
a replay in slow blow-by-blow
motion of another Game of the Week,
just a dial away from a soap
or a good murder show.

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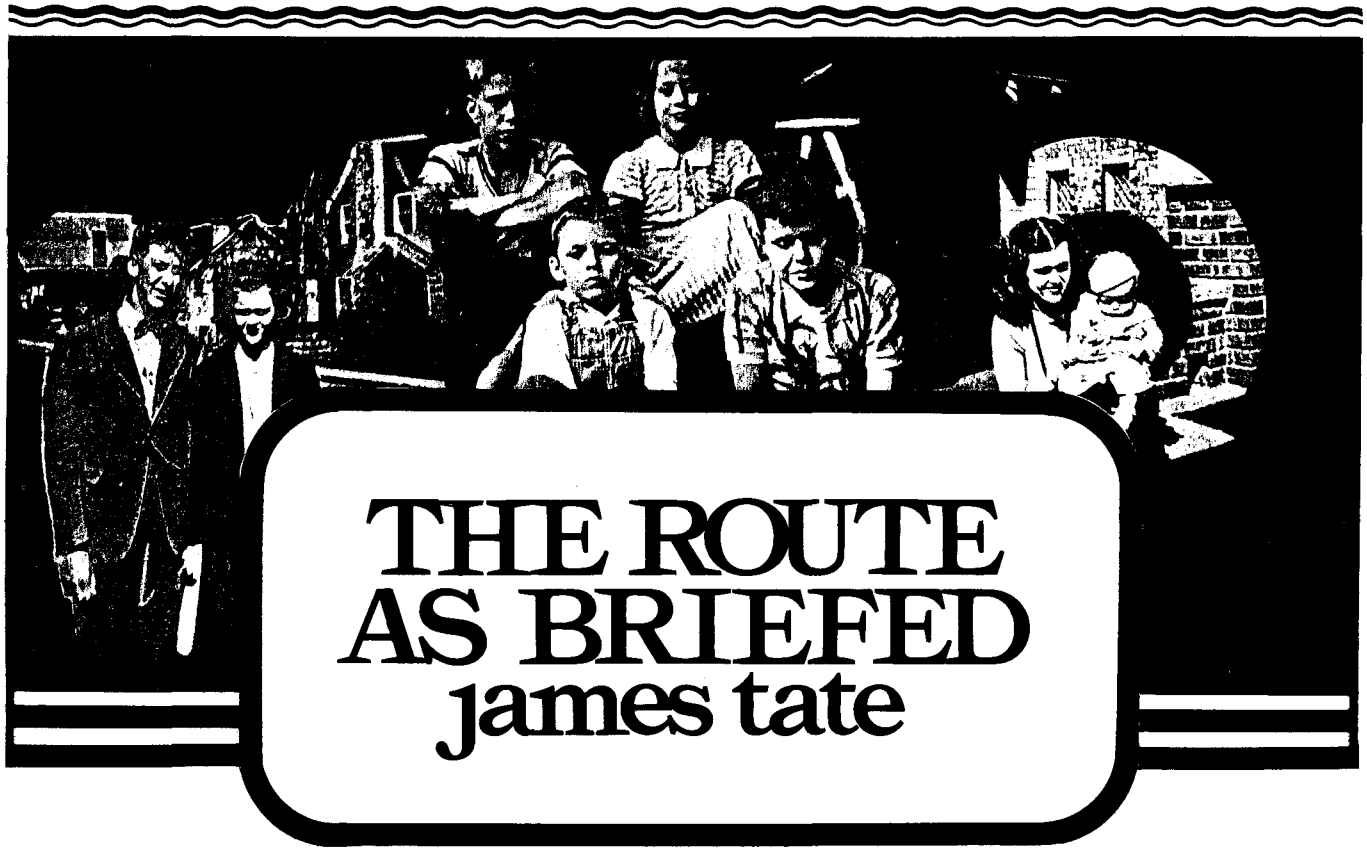

THE ROUTE AS BRIEFED

james tate

I always expected to meet my father on the street, probably downtown, because I imagined him wandering lost in a daze for years across Europe, through Africa, up South America, across the States, and finally some day standing at a streetlight down at 10th and Magee wondering which way to go now. I knew we would stop and stare at each other, drawn by some deep instinct that was a father and his boy—no matter he'd only seen a picture of me one month old, and I a bunch of worn photographs of him taken before my lifetime. I knew he would be changed; the war and the years of wandering would have stolen his handsome youth. I was ready for that. I had aged him in my mind many times, preparing for the fated reunion.

For all the continuing adoration in our household, I knew almost nothing about him. I have no idea what his interests were: only that he was kind, gentle, strong. I don't know if he had any time for college or work between graduation from Paseo High School and enlistment in the Air Force. I knew he was Number One in his Flight School Class and achieved the rank of Lieutenant while pilot of a B-17 in the Eighth Air Force flying out of England. He was up for leave when the crush was on with the bombing of Germany. They extended the number of combat missions just as my father was preparing to come home for Easter and see his beloved wife and newborn son. That's when he was shot down, the next flight.

We were living with my Grandma and Grandpa Clinton. Grandpa Clinton worked for the Federal Reserve Bank longer than any man in their national history. He was a very mild, level-headed man who refused to go to church with the rest of the family. One night he sat up from his sleep and said to my grandmother, "Virgil has just been shot down over Germany!" He woke the whole family and told them. Then he sat up alone the rest of the night and waited for the telegram.

They never found him. The rest of the crew was accounted for. Some were wounded. Some were dead. And some were in prison-camps. Roy Weaver, my father's best friend and co-pilot, was in a prison-camp. His wife Mildred was my mother's best friend. They had even been photographed together several times by the Kansas City Star as two typical heroic and beautiful young war brides. Mildred had a daughter, born about the same time as me, named Joy.

My mother waited every day for information. Nothing came. Sometimes another telegram assured her that they were looking everywhere; or perhaps he had now passed from one status to another more grave (we never understood or accepted these). There were constant phone calls to wives or to servicemen home on furlough.

JAMES TATE, when younger, was a Yale Younger Poet. Since then a number of books of his poems have appeared, including Absences *and* Hottentot Ossuary. *He teaches at the University of Massachusetts, in Amherst.*

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And then the war was over. No one in our house knew how to celebrate the great victory for which everyone at home had pulled so selflessly. We didn't feel like we had won. But you had to act happy for those whose beloved men did come back in one piece or pretty near.

Roy Weaver made it back without a scratch. He seemed okay at first. My mother waited restlessly for the right moment to ask him about Virgil. Why didn't Roy bring it up? The need was so obvious as to baffle my mother at his awkward reticence. We visited the Weavers three or four times the first month he was back; Mildred seemed to accept the situation and didn't know what to say to my mother.

At her wit's end, one day my mother finally broke the idle chat and said, "What happened to Virgil, Roy?"

Roy moved the coffee cup away from his mouth and onto the saucer and said, swallowing, "Well, the plane was hit. It was hit bad. Half a wing was on fire. Nobody was hurt but we were going down. I said to Virgil, 'Let's ditch it.' He said to go on, he was going to hold it until we were gone and then follow. And that was it. I never saw him again. Mickey Spoletto, our gunner, was shot while he was coming down. Mark Janowicz was sent to a camp in Italy and got shot trying to escape. Hal Ober, the navigator, was with me in camp."

He avoided looking my mother in the eyes. He took another gulp of coffee, leaned back and said, rather distantly: "I always asked everyone new when they came in the camp if they had heard any news about Virgil."

We waited for him to go on. But he didn't. He sank into himself. Several minutes passed in silence when all present floated in their own rich war melancholy. Only now after so much singing was it beginning to seem real.

"What did they say?" asked my mother.

"Nothing," he said. "Never a word. They never even found the plane. . . ."

Mildred Weaver called my mother two weeks later and said that Roy had disappeared. He had gone out for a paper five days before and hadn't returned. My mother and I went over immediately and I played with Joy while Mildred wrung her hands and cried on my mother's shoulder, saying that he had been acting strange ever since he had gotten back. And that it had been getting worse. We spent a lot of time with Mildred and Joy over the next three weeks until the police called one day and said they had found him. He had written two thousand dollars worth of bad checks all across the Midwest and West. He was in jail in Seattle and it wasn't until someone finally thought to have him examined by a psychiatrist that they realized he was a victim of total amnesia. He knew not his name, his address, nor a single fact of his life.

They sent him back to Kansas City where he was put in therapy at the state hospital for several months, and then continued as an out-patient for some time after that. He got a job at the Chevrolet plant and Mildred seemed to be herself again. We all went on picnics together to Swope Park or Fairyland.

Sometimes at home my mother would stop what she was doing, ironing or making cookies, and take my hand. We would walk out on the front porch and sit down on the swing. "This is the day your father and I were married," she would say. Or, "This is your father's birthday." Or, "This is the day your father was shot down, three years ago today, Tommy. You would have loved him. He was so . . . kind. So handsome! Everybody loved Virgil."

And it was true, everybody did love Virgil. Everyone in my mother's family worshipped him and his loss was an enduring pain to them. His name was spoken so often at the dinner table it sometimes seemed to me, who had never met him, that he had just left the room. Nobody could believe he was dead.

Roy Weaver knew my mother didn't believe him. The friendship was strained because of this. There seemed to be a terrific struggle going on inside of Roy one day when we dropped by to see Mildred and Joy. We were surprised to find Roy home from work. He shrugged off the inquiry my mother made by saying, "Oh, I thought I felt a cold coming on." Mildred was in the next room taking her hair down. We sat down with him. He stood up and started pacing in front of us with his eyes straight ahead at the wall. "You know, Norma," he said, "Virgil almost made it."

"What are you talking about, Roy. . . .?"

"You see, I helped Virgil escape, the first night after they had registered us and stripped us at the camp. I was to start a ruckus with the guard and draw all the attention, risk getting shot right there on the spot. Then Virgil could make a break for it. I would probably get shot anyway when they made the connection that I had rigged it. As much as I loved my wife and Joy, whom I hadn't seen yet, I would have laid down my life to put Virgil back safely in your arms with little Tommy. I tried, Norma, honest I did. I called that guard every name in the book. The guard came toward me all right; the trouble was, instead of engaging in any kind of fight with me he just slammed me a good one with the butt of his rifle in the back of the head, here, just at the top of the neck. I went out cold. I remember trying to fight my way back to consciousness: I kept thinking, I've got to save Virgil, I can't just lay here like this, I've got to pull myself up and save Virgil!

"When I came to, I had the sensation that I had just closed my eyes for a second. I was in my cot in the sleeping room. Everybody was asleep. I couldn't believe it. Had the whole incident been a dream? I looked over at Virgil's cot and somebody was in it. At first I thought it was Virgil, but this guy was bigger. I leaned over to Hal Ober who was sleeping beside me and said, "Where's Virgil?" Hal looked at me and said, 'He made it.' I was so happy I felt like screaming, 'Did you hear that, boys? Virgil made it!' "

"He made it?" my mother asked incredulously.

"That's what I thought all that night. I didn't even mind my throbbing headache; I thought I had helped Virgil escape that nightmare. The next day out in the yard the guard who had hit me in the head the night before swaggered up to me and said: 'Your friend, the lieutenant, almost made it; too bad.' Apparently our temporary camp was within a few miles of Allied-held territory and Virgil was shot by a sniper within yards of freedom."

My mother sobbed into her handkerchief. Mildred came into the room and could guess what they were talking about. My mother tried to pull herself together.

"Well then, why wasn't his body found. . . .?" She couldn't finish.

Roy suddenly seemed elsewhere. "I don't know," he said. "I don't know. That's a good question."

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Roy disappeared again after that. It was the same story. Wandering here and there aimlessly, a string of bad checks through Illinois and Ohio, finally catching up with him in Albany, no idea who he was. We had to take care of Mildred and Joy during these times. Mildred herself always seemed close to a breakdown; her nerves were in shreds. She couldn't talk about the war. "Let's talk about something else, what do you say?" she would say anxiously to my mother if my mother happened to mention anything to do with it. That didn't leave too much to talk about, since both of their lives had been so thoroughly changed by it, by what had happened to their husbands.

Joy, with whom I silently played in the next room, didn't know where her father went when he was away for so long. My mother told me. I had some thoughts about Joy's father, Roy. I thought he probably forgot everything and went crazy because he knew where my father was or what had happened to him, and for some reason he couldn't tell us, and that was driving him crazy and making him forget who he was. I knew he must be suffering, but I thought it was cruel of him to not tell us the truth. My mother and I secretly feared that he wasn't telling us the truth because the truth was too awful.

After he had been brought back again and gone to the hospital for a while and had a new job and seemed to be acting like a normal person, a good husband and father, we started seeing them again. It always took us a little while to get back to visiting them right after Roy came back, because we knew it must be hard for them. Mildred was very nervous. Joy was getting old enough to see that her father changed a good deal. They could tell when he was going to go off, but they didn't know how to stop him, were afraid to try.

I spent a lot of time now going through boxes of old photographs of my mother and father as young lovers in high school, Virgil in a baggy grey flannel suit and a white shirt open at the neck, his arm around my mother. They appeared to be very happy, very much in love. Then there were worried tender photographs of train partings, my mother and his mother kissing him on each cheek for the picture Mr. Woods was taking, shaking on his wooden leg. Then many handsome photographs of Virgil in flight school, standing proud with his classmates; and later his flight crew, they looking at him with personal pride and respect. Virgil working late at night in his office on the base, serious paperwork, his leather jacket on, his hat, looking up. My mother had an album the service had given her, and she filled it with clippings and mementos: napkins from dances at the base when he was stationed in Oklahoma at first and my mother lived there with him, just pregnant with me. Anything pertaining to their lives, even a grim list of his classmates on which she had written in small script the fate of each young man—dead, prison camp in Italy, prison camp in Germany, wounded, home safe. Out of helplessness more than bitterness she was comparing her fate to others. Was she the only one whose husband was lost . . . just not found? Had the War Machine cranked down, disassembled itself and transformed the demons of death into babyfood and fast cars without uncovering a trace of Lieutenant Michael Virgil Woods or his B-17? Had they been just swallowed up by the heavens; had the friction between death and desire erased him?

There were the love letters, too, including excited fatherly remarks about little Tommy, and how Easter was coming soon and he would be home at last. I tried to imagine his voice as I read these. When I stared at the pictures and read the letters at the same time I could see his mouth move. And I was confident he would find us, no matter if he was like Roy and had forgotten his name, had forgotten where we lived. He would stumble on and when he found us then it would all come back to him and we would tell him how long we had waited for this day.

The older I got, the more I was convinced Roy Weaver had the secret of my father's disappearance. By the time I was six I was determined to get it out of him myself. My mother had given up hope of ever getting Roy to talk sense. It wasn't fair to question him, anyway, because he was crazy and suffered terribly himself. We didn't see them as much now. They had moved to another house and it was on the other side of town. The parents made plans to get Joy and me together because we still thought of each other as friends.

I didn't know how to act around Roy. If I forgot he was sometimes crazy, then he did something to remind me and I was embarrassed. And I didn't think it was nice to treat him as if he were crazy, even if I had known how to treat a crazy person. And besides, you didn't notice it most of the time. He didn't seem *very* crazy, just unnatural in the way he would look at me sometimes, as if (I thought always) he wanted to say something.

One time he was looking at me so intently and yet not saying anything that I finally broke the silence and said with uncharacteristic bravery, "Go on, what were you going to say?" He shook his head and said, "Oh, I was just thinking how proud your father would be of you. You look quite a lot like him, you know."

"I might not now," I said enigmatically.

"What do you mean by that, Tommy?" he asked.

"I mean he might look much different now, he would be older."

"Yes." We sat there in silence for a few moments and then he said to me, "Do you think about him much, Tommy?"

"Yes," I said.

"What do you think?"

"I think I'll meet him downtown some day," I said.

My mother and Mildred came back from shopping and it was time for us to go home. That was the most I had ever talked to Roy. I was more convinced than ever that he was hiding something from us. I told my mother on the way home. I said, "Why don't you just make him tell you the truth? Can't you force him?" She said she couldn't because Roy was sick and wasn't responsible for what he said.

Roy called that night and said he was going to tell her the truth. The truth was awful and he had wanted to hide it from her. Virgil had made him promise that he would never tell. The truth was, he said, that Virgil had lost both arms and legs and was taken care of by an old farm woman some place in France, he didn't remember where.

We didn't see the Weavers after that. A few years later they moved to Texas. Every now and then my mother would say, "Remember Mildred Weaver?" And I would say yes. "They say he's just as bad, poor Roy."

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In 1950 my mother was 27 and I was exactly 20 years younger. For the most part we lived those first seven years with my grandparents on 47th Street Terrace, between Woodland and Garfield, in the center of Kansas City. My three aunts, Connie, Irma, and Marty, and my Uncle Everett lived there, too, in various stages of maturity. We were a big happy family and loved one another equally; there were no power struggles, each had his own place.

My real father, Virgil, was reported missing on a bombing mission over Stuttgart in April of 1944, five months after I was born. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Woods, who were caretakers at the Kansas City Zoo and lived in a shack on the premises there, both died of grief before the end of '44. We had lived with them there at first, I'm told.

After two years of lonesome mourning and waiting, my mother started to date a little. She dated a Catholic by the name of Bud Tie, dark-haired and handsome with rosy beer-warmed cheeks and a slightly devilish smile. They went out once a week for the next four years, and sometimes he would even come over and sit with us around the radio. It was generally assumed they would marry some day. They were engaged on and off.

My mother surprised us all one day by announcing at dinner that she had just married this guy by the name of Joe Quincy. We had barely met him! To our knowledge she had been out three or four times in the past two weeks with him and we knew nothing about him, except that he was three years younger than she, was quite handsome by the standards of the day, and was employed as a lineman for the Bell Telephone Company.

Then there was a lot of sudden hustle and bustle. Boxes were packed and runs were made up to the new house. The new house was a little four-room white-shingled green-shuttered bungalow about eight blocks away from where we were, over on 49th Street, near Prospect, on a steep hill.

My mother hadn't bothered to find out much about Joe Quincy before she married him. In that first couple of weeks Joe and I ended up alone in the house several nights when my mother worked late at the chrome fixture company. The first night I was alone on the floor of my room lining up a hundred lead soldiers in impeccable rows when Joe came in and knelt down beside me. He smiled warmly but tensely, and said, "Ever seen one of these before, Tommy?" I looked down and there was a gun in his hand. "It's a .38," he said. I didn't know what to say. "Here, go ahead, hold it," he said, putting it out next to my hand on my knee.

"Is it loaded?" I asked, stalling.

"Do you want it to be?" he said.

"No," I said.

It was loaded and now he took the bullets out and put them on the floor by my cannons.

"It's heavier than I thought," I said.

"Go ahead and pull the trigger," he said.

"At what?" I asked.

"At anything," he said. "Shoot your lamp out."

"All right," I said. And tried to hold the gun up with my one hand steady enough to take aim at my lamp.

"You would have missed it," he said.

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"How come?"

"Because you were shaking. Use both hands this time. Hold it out in front of your chin. That's right."

I admit I thought it a bit peculiar to have my brand-new stepfather teaching me to shoot the light out of my room with a .38. Though it could have been easily explained. All the men I knew hunted, were proud of their rifles. Joe didn't leave much room for interpretation, though. He started telling me about crime and gangsters in Chicago. He didn't say exactly what he had done there, but it was strongly implied that he had used that pistol on more than one occasion and even that it was "not too safe" for him to be back there right now. There was a certain amount of pride in the way he related the picture.

I didn't tell my mother right away, but I was certainly curious to know if she was aware of this man's past, if she knew about the gun, if she approved. Then Joe and I were again alone for a few hours one evening and it was I who brought him around to this Chicago hood world. He seemed reluctant to talk about it again. I asked him if he belonged to the Mafia, and he said "No no no," very irritably. He kept opening beer bottles and pacing up and down the living room where I sat on a low green chair and stared up at him, trying to understand him.

Then we could hear my mother's high heels coming up the two flights of concrete steps, weary from late night work. Joe looked at me and said "Go into your room," very brusquely. I had never seen him like this before, but then again they had only been married a few days short of a month.

I did as I was told, resentfully, for I wasn't used to this treatment in the old house. I stood my soldiers up all around me. They had me completely surrounded. I didn't stand a chance. So I closed my eyes, held my breath, and flew in a spastic explosion, all four limbs in a mad destructive whirl.

There was yelling, a real vicious fight going on out there. He was yelling "We're going!" And she was yelling "We're not going!" over and over and I could imagine that he was giving her what I called "Indian rub-burns" because she was screaming "Let go of me! Let go of me! You're hurting me!" And I was so nervous I didn't know what to do, so very quickly I set up all the soldiers around me again and instantly demolished all hundred of them with a crazed running somersault.

Then she screamed in horror and pain, "Tommy, come here!" and I scrambled to my feet and plunged through the door into the livingroom. Both of Joe's bare forearms were gushing blood all over his clothes and the divan and the coffeetable, the throw-rug and the hardwood floor. I had never seen so much blood. I thought he was a goner. Joe was standing there, shocked, holding his arms, but delighting in the disbelief and reverence and horror on both of our faces. I had to call the ambulance while my mother got some clean rags to tie around his arms so he wouldn't lose so much blood. Joe was sputtering to himself in a delirium of self-pity, neither resisting nor assisting my mother. He was taken off and sewn up and was in the hospital for a couple of days.

Before the ambulance came my mother was sure to pick up the knife from the pool of blood on the floor where it was almost hidden. She hid it on the back porch just in time. There were questions, but I don't remember the story we finally agreed on. I stayed home and cleaned up the blood while she went to the hospital with him. I barely knew what was going on—that is to say, what had happened.

My mother came home around midnight and I was still up. I told her I couldn't sleep until she told me what had happened. She said Joe had tried to kill himself because he was mad at her. That seemed pretty extreme to me, so I inquired further. She said he wanted to move out of this house right away, like tomorrow. And that she didn't want to, she wanted to stay right there. She had her job and I had to go to school.

When Joe came home from the hospital he found out he had been fired from his job with Bell. Now he was mad, he was sulking all the time. I tried to stay out of the house as much as I could when I was not in school, until my mother came home at 6:30. And even then I dreaded it. They yelled all the time. I stayed in my room, trying to lose myself to the soldiers.

I knew my mother was afraid, but I also knew she didn't want to alarm me. Then one day Joe's parents arrived from Detroit to stay with us for two weeks. I'd never seen people like them before. They were completely dissipated by alcohol. When I sat down for my cereal at 7:15 they were both there at the breakfast table with a fifth of bourbon and several ashtrays overflowing with butts. Repulsing me with their foul breath, they'd pat me on the back and say, "What do you say there, little boy?"

Then at dinner table at night old Mr. Quincy, barely able to hold onto the bottom of his chair to keep from rocking out, would start up with, "Joe thinks you ought to come on back up with us to Detroit, Norma. Pretty nice town."

"Maybe later," my mother would answer vaguely, concentrating on her meal. I wasn't saying a thing. Joe was doing all he could to hold back his rage against the world.

My mother and I were tremendously relieved when Mr. and Mrs. Quincy finally drifted away. Nothing was real while they were there. The haze they were in suffused the whole house and our way of seeing everything. Joe was supposed to be looking for a job, but my mother didn't believe he was. He was up to something. Out all day, with his .45 or .38, depending on his mood. From the fights I overheard I don't think he was pulling jobs so much as making contacts—of some kind, for something. Several weeks went by and Joe was visibly changing before our eyes. They didn't seem married so much as mutually trapped.

Joe taught me how to clean both of his guns, and this was something I enjoyed. It was one of those exclusive joys, where I knew I was the only kid in my third-grade class who could disassemble and clean a .45 automatic. Now that was a heavy pistol; I *had* to use two hands to hold it up steady and pretend to blow out all the lights. Joe gave me a bullet for it which I could carry around in my pocket and fiddle with, my forbidden secret.

One night they were really going at it. It was late. I had had the lights off for two hours but couldn't sleep. I didn't want to miss anything; and besides I was afraid for all our lives. The voices rose to a more and more frantic pitch and finally there were four terrible explosions at split-second intervals. Joe had told me that gun would leave a hole in a man's back as big around as a half-gallon can of peaches.

I must have had a moment's thought before running out there.

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"Get back in your room, Tommy!" my mother yelled at me, with her hands clutching at her own face in terror.

Our neighbors called the police, not because they were afraid someone might have been shot but because the noise bothered them. They were old. Again there was this ridiculous attempt to hide the evidence quickly. Rugs were moved to cover up the holes blown into the floor. Somehow my mother lied herself out of this one, too, with her innocent endearing face. Joe hid in the basement.

The next day I was sent down to the hardware store on Prospect to buy some plastic wood in a tube, and I got to spend three or four hours that afternoon and evening filling up the holes. It was still pretty conspicuous when I got done, but at least you wouldn't stub your toe in one of the holes.

I don't know if my mother had told her family what was going on. Perhaps she had told Connie, the sister closest to her in age. They were very close and gave each other advice in difficult situations. Connie and my mother had gone to Acapulco on a spree for six weeks with the government money my mother got after they gave up looking for my father and declared him dead.

But I think now she was really afraid to involve anyone. Joe was a desperate man and had to be handled very cautiously lest he tear into you, himself, or the floor with one of his deadly weapons.

I heard them up talking almost all one night; I wasn't trying to stay awake and eavesdrop. I was tired and their voices were a constant whisper all night, no yelling this time. I got up drowsier than usual at seven and was about to brush my teeth when my mother came into the bathroom and said to me, "Tommy, you're not going to go to school today." I failed to delight in this announcement the way a respectable seven-year-old should have; I knew something was up, probably something big.

I was given a quick bowl of cereal and then told to make myself useful by loading the car, a 1949 black Ford. My mother stuffed clothes and even my soldiers and towels and sheets into the trunk in a hurry. We were on the road for Detroit by eight, without so much as a goodbye to my grandmother or anybody.

My mother did all the driving. I sat up front with her and read the maps while Joe lay on the floor in the back seat under a rug. Every time we saw one of those black and white 1950 Ford police cars on the highway my mother and I bit our lips and she hissed out of the side of her mouth, "*Stay down,*" to Joe in the back. We ate in little roadside drive-ins, dusty root beer stands in small-town central Iowa; then into Wisconsin, which was more beautiful, and I remember almost thinking we were on vacation. It was hard to think that for long, because Joe was back there asking us if it was clear and where we were and how much longer till Detroit.

When we got to his folks' place in Detroit, Joe rushed out of the back seat and up the walk to the door. My mother and I sat in the car at his instruction and waited. He was back in a couple of minutes, looking panicked.

"We can't stay here," he said, getting back in the car. "The place is being watched." His parents came out on the porch and woozily waved at us, as though we were leaving after a long visit. We were all tired and dirty and the car was littered with potato chip bags and Dixie cups.

"What about Tommy?" my mother asked.

"He can stay here."

"I'm not staying here," I said meekly.

"All right," Joe said, "but we've got to get moving. I don't feel comfortable out front here, this is the first place they'll look when they hear I've hit town."

My mother started the car and we took off. Mr. Quincy was hanging onto the porch railing and wishing us well.

My mother and I were back in Kansas City three days later. At school my friends said, "You been sick?" "No," I said, "I've been on a vacation." "Where to?" they asked disbelievingly. "Detroit," I answered proudly.

My mother and I stayed in the new old house alone. I got a pet alligator and two birds from Japan. It was quiet now. I missed my old chums in the neighborhood down on 47th at my grandmother's, but I could walk the eight blocks several times a week when I got lonesome up on our hill where mostly old people lived.

Occasionally one of them would ask, "How's your new dad?" And I'd have to answer, "I don't know." I didn't really know what had happened to him. We were all hysterical for a couple of days hiding around at Joe's old hoodlum friends' in Detroit. Then they got him, the police, but I don't really remember how.

In fact, for many years I didn't even know what for. Then my mother's youngest sister, Marty, told me one night. Marty was only three years older than me, 17 years younger than my mother. "What ever happened to Joe?" I asked her years later.

"He got the electric chair," she said matter-of-factly.

"What for?" I asked.

"Didn't you know, Tommy?" she said, "Joe killed his first wife."

My mother and I took pride in our little house on 49th. I started a vegetable garden in the backyard. I had five rabbits in a hutch. After a year my mother quit the chrome fixture company and took a job with Encyclopaedia Britannica as a secretary. She still had to work late several nights a week, after dark. She was my best friend, so I was glad when she came up the hill. I would walk or run down the hill to tell her something.

In the summers we went swimming every day we could at the huge Fairyland Park public pool—just take the bus straight out Prospect to 75th, the end of the city then. But it was crowded all the same. After the epidemic in 1952 and '53 it should have been rechristened Polio Public Pool. That never stopped us. We came early so my mother could find a place for her beach towel. We both would be barbecued by three, darker and darker as the summer rolled on. I in the water, she on her beach towel.

And when she got her week off in July we took the bus down to Lake Tannycomo in the Ozark regions of southern Missouri. We would rent a little cabin and spend every minute of sunshine on the beach or out on an inflatable raft, dozing and soaking up the scalding reflection off the water. One day my mother and I both fell asleep on our separate rafts and floated down the enormous lake ten miles before I woke and yelled to her. We laughed about that for a long time.

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At night there was the Barefoot Club. That was a little cellar tavern with sawdust on the floor (to encourage bare feet) and a rocking good jukebox sending out "ABC Boogie" for the young happy people to dance to. I danced quite a bit myself. My mother sometimes met nice men and would sit there in a booth drinking a few beers. Connie came with us once and they both met men they liked, though I don't know how seriously. I do remember that both of their men persisted after everyone had returned to Kansas City. My mother and Connie would talk on the phone about them and say how disgusting they were and then laugh like crazy, and then double-date once in a while.

We lived on in that house for five years until I was 12. One day I traded my sizeable collection of lead soldiers for a cheap set of plastic spacemen and regretted it immediately.

I never did make too many friends in that neighborhood. The old lady next door who called the police when Joe shot off his .45 went crazy one night and carved up my five rabbits. I discovered them the next morning, parts hurled savagely all over the backyard. I knew she had done it, and though I was afraid of her I pulled in my chest, crossed my fingers, and rang her doorbell. She pretended not to know why I was there. I finally found my voice and just as I found it broke into tears, grumbling: ". . . You killed my rabbits . . . you killed my rabbits. . . ." I had her there, she couldn't lie in the face of such a passionate accusation as I delivered. Yes, she said, she had killed my rabbits in the night. They were getting into her garden and eating all her carrots. That was a lie: the smartest and strongest rabbit in the world couldn't have broken out of that hutch. She had killed those rabbits just because she thought they *might* some day break out and eat a carrot or so from her garden.

I saved my money, my allowance and the bits I made raking leaves or shoveling snow, and in a month I was able to descend upon a pet shop and purchase a dozen guppies, three black mollies, three zebras, three neons, one pencil fish and one hatchet fish.

I did poorly in school. My fourth grade teacher suggested I might be mentally deficient. My mother had to take time off from work and pay many visits to her. I was always apprehensive about these meetings. They made me nervous. One time Mrs. Webb suggested to my mother and the Principal that I be taken out of school and placed in a home for children like me. My mother was outraged and told the teacher off right there in front of Mr. Thomas, the Principal, and me. I fainted, right onto the floor. My mother exploded all the more. From my coma I could hear her furiously yelling, "See what you've done to him! Why, you shouldn't be allowed to teach children!" The Principal consulted my test scores and took our side against Mrs. Webb, suggesting that possibly she had "the poor child" so frightened he wasn't able to perform. But the real truth was, I wasn't interested in school. I wasn't a silent genius; I was just a daydreamer.

The move away from my grandmother's old neighborhood of 47th Street, where I had so many friends, had more and more affect on me as time went by. I began to see that I wouldn't make new friends as good as they had been. Our lives had been magical then; a dozen of us in a four year age-span had lived together day and night in the streets and in the woods in back of our houses, through all the seasons of the year for seven years. I could go back, but it was different now: some of them were already in high school, some had moved. By habit, as much as anything, solitude became a state of mind.

We spent several nights a week down at Johnny's Bar and Bar-BQ, around the corner on Prospect. We knew Johnny and he looked after us. I became the house shuffleboard champion when I was nine. No one could beat me. And, consequently, I could drink free Cokes all night and play the jukebox a bit. My mother and I had many friends in there. Sometimes we would go down with one of her boyfriends, and sometimes we went down alone but always ended up meeting somebody she knew. We could eat a sandwich there as well—good thick Bar-BQ beef or ham sandwiches.

Jarvis Thurston, a nice man she went out with for a year, would sometimes take us out to Mary's Roadhouse, outside the city limits, where they had a very wild Western band. It was very loud and there were usually at least a couple of fights before we got out of there, but there was a lot to watch so I looked forward to it. Jarvis wanted to marry my mother, and my mother liked him quite a bit. She used to ask me how I would like to have Jarvis as a father. I could never really imagine what a father was supposed to be. I tried to give her an answer when she asked me what I thought of any of the men that came over to our house. It was easy to see through some of them, especially since they always thought the key to my mother's heart was me and would make fools of themselves trying to please me. One fool promised me a motorcycle for my 10th birthday; even I knew that was fantasy.

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I liked Jarvis and I felt sorry for him when my mother said no to his proposals. Their relationship had arrived at the point when she was either going to have to marry him or they would have to break up. He was there late every night, pleading with her, and sometimes he would even be asleep on the couch in the morning. I thought this was pretty funny. Jarvis was really in love with my mother, you could see it on his face when he slept. He was very large and the couch was very small.

He said to me on one of these mornings in the summer of 1953: "Tommy, how would you like to go to camp?" I said, "What camp?" And he said, "Well, it's called Rotary Camp. It's not too far from here, just out highway 50 in Independence." "What do they do there?" I said. And he said, "Well, they've got a swimming pool, and I'm sure they have a baseball field, and plenty of woods to hike around in. And there will be lots of kids your age, and your mother and I thought you just might like it."

I thought for a minute, and then said, "When is it?"

"Well, your mother and I could drive you out there today and pick you up in two weeks. And we'll come out and visit you on Parents' Day."

It seemed kind of sudden to me. I don't think I had ever been away from home that long, certainly never without someone else in the family. I didn't even know what the Rotary Club was. But I got the picture. They wanted me to go. "All right," I said, "I'll go."

That afternoon they dropped me off at the place with my suitcase. It wasn't much to look at. It was just flat dry ground with some tents on it. Nobody seemed very excited to be there, including the counselors to whom my mother, Jarvis, and I were introduced. Then Jarvis and my mother said goodbye, and I immediately felt forsaken. I was put in a tent with five other boys and told who my tent-captain or whatever they called him would be. He didn't like me for some reason right off, probably thought I was laughably timid or something. I didn't like him, but only because of the teasing way he spoke to me and whispered my name at night as a joke.

We were led rigidly through certain sports and events each day. It was the rigidity that made me nervous. Just as I was beginning to enjoy the baseball game or the swim or whatever, there was a whistle in my ears telling me to quick throw that down and pick this up. This also made it difficult to make any friends: 20 minutes to the second for each meal, no talking after lights out. If the Army is a vacation, then I was in the Army.

In my spare minutes between the events of the day I began to take an interest in the tarantula and scorpion populations that thrived all over the campgrounds and in the surrounding woods. First we found them in our beds at night, both tarantulas and scorpions. Though the tarantulas presented a more powerfully hideous view to the eye, we were told the scorpions were the ones to really watch out for. A scorpion would be just as happy to sting you in your sleep, while the tarantula would either just cuddle up beside you or pass on by. I got to be known right away for my fearlessness with regard to tarantulas. I watched them and knew their ways, knew how to handle them and, indeed, was not in the least afraid after a while to let a perfectly virile tarantula fully fanged walk across my naked shoulders and down my arm into my hand where I would stroke his hair affectionately (and with caution).

A photograph still exists, somewhere in all the boxes, of me, naked to the waist, the skinny torso swarming with my entire tribe of tarantulas, 20 strong, and an idiotic beatific grin across my face. I would lure them out of their nests in the ground by waving a match inside the lip of the hole, or by sticking a straw down and teasing whomever was home. They'd come out, fangs like tiny mastodon tusks flashing angry threats at me. Of course they could jump (so can scorpions), so there was a small amount of danger. But I was armed with a pair of pincers made from a hanger, and I was quick to pick them up, gently always. Then I would put them in a cardboard box with chicken wire across the top, and keep them alive and happy with Welch's grape jelly. I lost my fondness for scorpions when I realized right away that I could never let them walk on me. You could clip the tips of the tarantulas' fangs in such a way as to not hurt them —as long as they were prisoners anyway and would be spoon-fed their Welch's grape jelly, which they all loved madly—but you couldn't clip the stinger of the scorpion without killing him; that's what I figured out for myself at the time, though I might have been wrong. And they were, if not deadly in Missouri, mighty painful—have you on your back for a week with a foot swollen up like a balloon. And they never seemed to adapt to the jelly diet. They were either listless or depressed; they all fell into these two categories.

One morning we were told in the breakfast speeches that it was Frank Buck Day and we should all go out there and really work hard catching snakes so that our tent would get the most points and win. They would give out awards that night after dinner around the swimming pool. They said our parents had been invited and many of them would be there. I must not have been listening because I didn't understand what was meant by Frank Buck Day, and therefore none of the rest of what was said made any sense to me. I was supposed to go out there and help my tent win, and then maybe my mother would be there at the swimming pool tonight.

I didn't want to ask anybody what we were supposed to do because I didn't want to appear stupid. And I would never have dared ask my tent-captain or whatever he was because he would have certainly torn into me then with some wicked ridicule. After a while outside, I could tell that the thing to do was find a stick. Everybody was running all over trying to find a certain kind of stick, a snake stick. I heard two boys talking about the point system: ten points for a rattlesnake, nine points for a copperhead, eight points for a water moccasin. Five points for a bullhead or a blue racer. Three points for a blacksnake. One for garter snakes and ringnecks. And so on. I was beginning to see the picture. And it didn't take me long to realize I didn't want any part of it. I didn't even care about the tent. I didn't really like any of them, and I hated the tent-captain. And most of all, I was frightened to death of poisonous snakes, which seemed to me—despite my predilection for tarantulas—to be just good sense.

Frank Buck Day, "bring-'em-back-alive," was a walking nightmare for me. There must have been fifty kids out there

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in the woods screaming louder and louder "I got one!" "I got another copperhead!" I carried the stick and the gunny-sack and was leaping on tip-toes in order to spend as little time as possible on the earth's surface with the deadly silent creatures menacing through the brush like liquid stilettoes. I pretended to have very bad luck, mumbling disappointed sighs when I let a four-foot copperhead slither over my shoe without reaching down and grabbing him behind his head.

To my utter amazement no one got bitten that day. I was relieved. And when the count came in, our tent was last. They figured it all up before dinner. I didn't care very much. My tent mates, rightly, said I was no help at all. The other five guys averaged around 32 points—that's about three poisonous snakes each with maybe a blue racer thrown in. I had three ringnecks at a point each. And to make it worse, these ringnecks of mine were only about two inches each, incredibly nice to hold in your palm. Like kittenish worms. But not worth spit on your Frank Buck scale; that was made very clear to me by our tent-captain, the taunter.

We had to sit at our regular tables in the dining hall. If our parents had come we wouldn't know until after dinner. Some kids were able to look around and catch sight of their parents across the hall eating with the counselors and exchange waves. I couldn't see my mother and was trying to accept the fact that maybe she hadn't been able to come: either she had to work late, or maybe Jarvis had taken her out dancing or to Mary's Roadhouse.

We filed outside to the pool area as soon as we had finished our Jell-o. The ones who were going to get the awards were excited. The rest of us just accepted this as another event. My tent-captain, Allen, who played sports in high school, pulled me aside when I came out of the dining hall.

"Come here, Woods," he said, "We're going to dress you up." I didn't know what he was talking about, but I knew I wasn't going to like it.

"What for?" I asked.

"Because, Woods, old boy, you have been elected 'Queen of Frank Buck Day.' "

I didn't want to bring it up now, but I still wasn't sure I knew who Frank Buck was, and what was the idea behind this Frank Buck Day I had just—almost—gotten through. Allen and two other tent-captains took me behind the gardener's shed and started dressing me up in makeshift girl's clothing and putting lipstick on my mouth and other things on my eyes and cheeks and a mop parted down the middle on my head. I saw nothing funny about it, but knew I was trapped. Now I hoped my mother and Jarvis weren't out there, though I had wanted to see them very badly before this new turn of events.

I could hear the leader of the camp announcing the tent awards and then the individual awards with his bullhorn over the pool. There was applause and laughter. ". . .And Charlie Paddock wins the first place award for the individual with the most poisonous snakes: Charlie brought back 12 copperheads, four water moccasins, and one rattler!" It was amazing. I knew Charlie Paddock and he was just an ordinary guy. Why does he get first place and I end up 'Queen of Frank Buck Day'?

Just when Allen and another guy had finished screwing a pair of dangling earrings on me, I heard the camp-leader saying, "And now folks, there is one last award that we give each year, and that is to the camper that catches the *least* snakes in our Frank Buck Day 'Bring 'em Back Alive' snake-catching competition. We call that award our 'Queen of Frank Buck Day Award!' " There was tremendous laughter. Allen grabbed me roughly under my arm and dragged me into the lights around the diving-board where the camp-leader was standing with his bullhorn.

"And our 'Queen of Frank Buck Day' this year is . . . Miss Tommy Woods! who caught all by *her*self three itsy bitsy ringnecks, about this long . . ." (he held up his thumb and forefinger a fourth of an inch apart). The parents and the campers were really laughing very hard now. The campers were yelling things. "Come on up here, Queen Tommy," the camp-leader said, standing on the diving-board. "You aren't afraid of water, too, are you?"

"No," I said.

"We have a prize for you; yes, we do," he said.

I had on high heels, so it was hard to walk. They were too big and I kept threatening to crash to either side with each step forward I took.

When I got up on the diving-board with the camp-leader I was in such a state of embarrassment and humiliation I was afraid to look at anyone, afraid to see if my mother and Jarvis had come. The camp-leader was saying some funny things which I couldn't hear, and then someone came up behind me and handed him one end of the most enormous blacksnake I have ever seen. It was six feet long and twelve inches around in the middle. Allen and the camp-leader stretched the snake out to its full length in front of the audience, which responded with appropriate sighs and gasps. Then the camp-leader said something into the bullhorn I didn't hear and they began to wrap the snake—it was, I remember he said, the camp's mascot of many years—around my neck. When it was wrapped around several times Allen handed me its tail to hold in my right hand and the camp-leader gave me its head to hold in the other. There was a burst of appreciation from the parents' gallery. And then Allen and the camp-leader pushed me off the diving-board into the deep end of the pool.

I expected the snake to strangle me, but apparently it had been through this enough times to be interested only in disentangling itself from my neck and saving itself. By the time I surfaced, white with fear, my make-up running and my mop-wig turned around sideways, everyone seemed to have forgotten about the Coronation ceremonies. They were standing in threes and fours discussing the wonderful opportunities the camp offered. The campers were giving their parents hotpads and lariats they had made for them, and the parents had Kool-Aid packages and Fritos for their sons.

I just wanted to creep through them as inconspicuously as possible and get back to the tent to change into dry jeans and scrub the lipstick off my face.

I heard my name called. "Tommy." My mother came up through the crowd to me and I felt ashamed to be standing there in that outfit, pained that she had seen me made a fool of out there in front of everyone. I desperately didn't want her to make a joke about it.

"That was terrible," she said.

I couldn't say anything. I was holding back.

"Where's Jarvis?" I said.

"He couldn't come."

"Aren't you going to marry him?" I said.

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My mother married Dick Murray, she said, because he was a young widower with a son (seven years younger than myself), and on his way up as a salesman for Monroe Matic Shock Absorbers; that gaudy blue and yellow company Ford, with frantic hype all over it, reminded me of him.

The boy, BillyBob, was emotionally retarded, and no wonder; Dick, the father, had no tolerance for anyone less powerful and perfect than himself. But he was a liar and fraud. He talked about the army; it didn't take us long to find out he meant high school ROTC. His stardom in basketball, baseball and football, too—all lies, a sandlot fumbler unliked in high school. But now he was making it. How his first wife died, we didn't know. BillyBob was six months old; he cried one night, she got up—pretty 22-year-old—and died. The cause of death never determined.

My mother caught Dick, who traveled four or five days a week, in the oldest game, not even through the first year, with lipstick on his collar. That did it, she'd never trust him after that. She was cold. And I didn't like him already. At first I thought it would be fine to have someone to play ball with, but he played with an anger in him that I felt—a difference of 100 pounds between us. I was good at baseball and swimming and nothing else. Dick couldn't swim so I became a champion in the next couple years.

We moved from the house on 49th right away. I had never understood where the house came from, how we got it. Then I heard my mother and Dick talking one night: she wanted to keep the house and buy another; she said the house belonged to me, Mrs. Woods had left it to me. But it wouldn't be big enough, Dick said. They could pay me back later when I was grown and would need it.

I was in the middle of seventh grade and was sorry to leave my friends. In the new school I felt I was an entirely different person. People saw me differently, and I guess I encouraged it. I was frustrated with the new life and took my confusion out on shoplifting sprees and gambling at school. At home, too, I took up the terrible practice of shooting certain kinds of birds—the starling and bluejays that preyed on the cardinals, bluebirds, and doves.

I found as many excuses as I could to visit the old neighborhoods, my Grandmother Clinton's on 47th and friends on 49th. But it was different; I had always loved my family and suddenly the new life hadn't the same fun. My mother found herself pregnant and this brought on her resignation, as well as her contempt: she had no way out of a doomed marriage, she thought, and would hold on without love until she could manage. We dreaded when Dick wouldn't go on the road. The screaming in the house, the threat of violence at all times, made life grim. But I could get away now and then, and I did. I was developing an image of black leather jacket and motorcycle boots.

To avoid the tensions and fights of the livingroom I would sit in my room at nights throwing dice against the wall, trying to understand patterns.

Vacations were always to the Ozarks, one place or another on the huge man-made lake. In those days it was not what you could call commercialized. We stayed in barren little cabins that were infested with scorpions. BillyBob was stung one time on the foot as he got into bed. We thought he might die, but the swelling went down in a week and he could walk again. I enjoyed looking for arrowheads and had found over fifty down there on different trips. We fished, rented boats, cooked out. Dick directed every activity. He sipped beer from early morning, though I never really believed he cared about drinking. It was just the way he was with everything—the few friends he had in the business he didn't really care about, certainly not if it meant getting a deal away from them. And the money, that was hard to figure out: he'd kill for it, but it seemed he only wanted it in the first place to intimidate others. I guess it was power, which he equated with class, that he wanted most. And it was class, of almost any conceivable kind, that he had none of. Standing out by the barbecue, turning the steaks or hamburgers, he looked absolutely alone sometimes, like what he was: a stranger to himself and to us.

Amy was born, a small frail baby with underdeveloped respiratory system. We worried about her the first year. More than once we found her turning blue, unable to breathe, and had to slap hell out of her. My mother had tried to love BillyBob, but she was bothered with his slowness—no one called him retarded then; he was a sad boy, often turned in on his own thoughts, slow to respond and clumsy. Dick would alternately brag that his son was going to be the greatest quarterback of the day and beat him mercilessly for dropping a piece of food from his plate. The boy jumped whenever his father tried to touch him.

Dick was three years younger than my mother. He was an only child. His father was a plumber in the old neighborhoods where we had lived. Mr. and Mrs. Murray were gentle, affable people who got by modestly, read the newspapers, and listened to the radio at night. They tacitly understood their son's quick talent for cruelty.

Dick's fortune as an automotive parts salesman varied greatly in the 7½ years that the marriage survived. He was "Salesman of the Year" the first year; but later, for years, money was the source of many, many ear-bursting battles. He was always the bigshot even when his big Buicks and Pontiacs were in imminent danger of repossession. He arrogantly bought three and four expensive suits when we didn't have enough to eat. He had to have the best in his business, he said; image was everything. But he wasn't likeable, finally, even to his own peers in shock absorbers or spark plugs.

The fights mounted in severity from year to year. My mother couldn't go out of the house for a week while she waited for the black eyes and swellings to disappear. Dick grew louder, more obnoxious. It was unpleasant to shop with him as he invariably started a shouting contest with a clerk or manager. We all dreaded holidays, knowing he would be home more than usual and that everything would be ruined by one of his arbitrary regimens, instant wrapping-paper pickup on Christmas while he drank beer and belched orders on his back on the couch. BillyBob always did something wrong; he broke his new toy or wasn't paying strict attention to instructions.

I certainly wasn't immune to blows. Dick sensed increasingly that I lacked feeling for him—not that he offered any himself. I felt sorry for him at times, thought how awful it would be to be him. I knew I would get away from it in a few years. But I worried about my mother and Amy and BillyBob. BillyBob was getting worse. Finally his teachers at the elementary school wouldn't allow him to continue in public school. By the time Amy was four she was beginning

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to reflect the constant tension in her home: she sat in a corner and pulled out her eyelashes and was starting on her hair. My mother was taking tranquilizers and drinking enough to calm her "nerves." Her three sisters, who still lived close by in Kansas City, listened at length to the horror stories she had to tell. She hadn't a cent to her name; Dick Murray didn't even have enough to support himself. Amy was too young to leave even if my mother could get a job. And nobody knew what would happen to BillyBob if a divorce did occur. He was getting torn apart, perhaps unbeknownst to himself: Dick didn't want him, wouldn't know what to do with him except give him back to his parents as he had done after his first wife's death. And my mother felt selfishly that Dick Murray had taken enough of a toll on her family: BillyBob, now under psychologists' care, was not hers.

She was afraid for her life; I also thought Dick was capable of killing her. His failings as a salesman were taken out on her in brutal beatings where it was obvious he no longer had control of what he was doing. He never showed remorse; his pride wouldn't allow that. When I tried to interfere I was given the same.

After some of these fights Dick wouldn't return for three or four weeks. He had girlfriends all over the four state area he worked. In the last couple of years he was away twice for six-month periods. My mother would find ways to get money out of him and she took a job herself in a bank nearby after Amy was in school. I was more interested in girls and cars than I was in school and sports. I hung around the drive-ins every night with a gang called "The Zoo Club."

When my mother and I talked about Dick it was with single-minded hatred. We had talked about murdering him; it was strange how natural the subject seemed. We knew neither of us would ever get a day in prison if caught. There were now dozens of friends and neighbors who could testify to his inhumanity. I had once pulled a gun on Dick, his own .25 automatic, in the midst of a particularly fierce lashing of my mother. I had stood there in the doorway of my room, watching the beating for what seemed like ten or fifteen minutes. I went to his dresser and got the gun, hesitated, and removed the clip; then walked down the stairs into the livingroom and pointed it a few inches from his temple: "Get out!" I shouted bravely with my equalizer.

The plan that seemed best involved his company car. He drove like a maniac on the highway, 95 or 100, and spoke with reverence—the only time he found that tone appropriate—of the martyrs, those brave traveling salesmen who gave their lives to bridge abutments, etc., in the line of duty. Over coffee in the morning my mother and I discussed the merits of loosening lug-nuts. Let him die for his cause; surely there was some sympathy behind that conception. As for protection, we finally took out an injunction forbidding him to step foot on the property. It had been advised by everyone. But Dick wouldn't be stopped: he cut his way through the screens one night and managed to jimmy the new lock we had put on. My mother woke with a shudder at him standing over her bed in the dark; she screamed for me and Dick laughed, said he just wanted to say hello. He had thought I was away.

The divorce action seemed to last forever, during which time my mother's emotional disintegration culminated in a drunken, fiery crash at noon in downtown Kansas City. She was thought dead at first but was revived by a policeman.

One day in March when I was eighteen I was sitting in a graveyard in Pittsburg, Kansas, and realized that no one in my family had ever visited my father's grave in Belgium. I didn't even know *where* in Belgium.

The first assumption of his death had been in an article in the Kansas City Star, September 4, 1945, 18 months after his disappearance. It said: "Lieut. M. Virgil Woods of the army air force, who has been reported missing in action since April 11, 1944, has been presumed by the War department to have been killed. Neither the wife nor the mother has given up hope that Woods will return." The decision to go to Belgium came from a combination of changes in my life, though I don't think I connected them consciously at that time, that afternoon. I had been in compulsory ROTC that year, my freshman year in college. The whole experience had been difficult for me, resulting in harsh punishment, sometimes of a violent nature. We viewed many war documentary films that depicted correct and incorrect maneuvers and procedures. My mother's marriage was breaking up back in Kansas City. And I had done something for which I felt guilt: I had legally changed my name from Woods to Murray. I had been called Murray ever since our move to Prairie Village, Kansas, a new suburb of Kansas City, in 1956. And so I rationalized that the legal act now was practical. My names had caused confusion for years. But I hated Dick Murray and loved the memory, the instilled memory, of my father. Also, I had started to write poetry that year, my freshman year in college, and somehow my father was more on my mind than he had been for several years. He was never far from my mind. I knew so absolutely precious little! The entire range of our family was dedicated to his memory, but facts, descriptions, never emerged—only a vague misty praise. "Your father was a wonderful man." "Your father would be so proud of you." "You look more like your father every day." My grandmother even absentmindedly called me Virgil occasionally.

I never felt that it was appropriate to ask for these "hard facts" that nagged at me. Was he or was he not actually found? It was years later that anything of this sort came out.

The government was paying my way through college to the tune of $110 a month. That was enough in Pittsburg,

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Kansas. But I didn't have anything left over. I called my mother and told her that I wanted to go to Belgium in June. I had been told from childhood that I had a $6000 trust fund—I never really knew who had established it for me, my father or my father's mother. I wanted to see if I could get a small part of it now for this good cause. My mother agreed to look into it for me, contact the lawyer, the legal guardian of my inheritance.

The $6000 turned out to be slightly less than $600. Lawyers' fees. I could have it all now if I wanted. There was obviously something fishy but I had little sense of money and $600 was something, it was enough. I booked passage on the *S.S. Groote Bier,* sailing from Hoboken to Rotterdam.

The voyage was six days. I took a train to Paris and contacted a woman with whom I had corresponded at the American Battle Monuments Commission at 20 rue Quentin Bauchart. She was a quite elderly lady who was extremely warm and helpful. She was shocked and amused at the decrepitude of the hotel I had chosen to stay in. We took long walks through the city. On several occasions she brought me small sacks of groceries that I could get by on in my room.

I had around $200 left after the round-trip ticket. I decided to spend $65 of it on a Solex, a small motorbike especially common in France. I left Paris for Liege, Belgium, slept in a field one night, and was there the next evening. It was too late to call the cemetery, the Ardennes Cemetery, 12 miles from Liege in the village of Neuville-en-Condroz.

I sat in my hotel and looked over the literature I had on the Cemetery.

"The cemetery, 50½ acres in extent, contains the graves of 5,250 of our military dead, many of whom died in the so-called 'Battle of the Bulge.' Their headstones are aligned in straight rows which take the form of a huge Greek cross on a lawn framed by masses of trees. Nearer the entrance, to the south of the burial area, is the memorial, a rectangular gray stone structure containing a small chapel, three large maps of inlaid marbles, 24 panels depicting combat and supply activities, and other ornamental features including the insignia of the major United States units in Northwest Europe. Two of the maps depict operations of the American Armed Forces, the third commemorates the Services of Supply in the European Theater. On the exterior is some large-scale sculpture. Along the sides, inscribed in granite slabs, are the names of 462 of the Missing who gave their lives in the service of their Country, but whose remains were never recovered or identified."

A man from the Cemetery picked me up in the morning. I was suddenly afraid. I was intent, nervous, sad and grim, all at the same time, and even considered the possibility of backing out, asking to be let out of the car. I could find my way back to the hotel somehow. I could lie to my mother, say I had seen it. I was very distracted and had trouble chatting with my host.

In the memorial, he asked if I had any questions. Would I like to see the flight plan for the mission on which my father was killed? I had never thought about such a thing; it was too much "of this world." I didn't know, so I said yes, I guess so, when what was really preoccupying me was his actual grave; that is what I had traveled all this way to see. The man had prepared for my visit and had some very hard-core information. Eight aircraft were lost in the raid on Stettin, the largest loss yet sustained by the 92nd Bombardment Group; 20 aircraft returned safely of the 28 dispatched. Six aircraft of the 325th Squadron that flew as low squadron to the high group were lost to savage and persistent fighter and flak attack. The entire mission was flown at an altitude of about 15,000 feet and required 11 hours to complete. Crew members described it as one of the "roughest" in memory. Enemy fighters outnumbered friendly ones, and the flak was accurate, varying from moderate to intense. Bombing results were good.

My father's aircraft was believed to have exploded about 12 miles north of Brunswick, an early victim of the high group in the fighter attack.

The evidence of his death suddenly seemed incontrovertible. Did my mother know this? Did everybody know it? I studied the maps in a haze.

The man asked me if I was ready to be led to the grave. I told him I would prefer to find it by myself.

"When would you like to be driven back to your hotel?" he inquired. I told him I would meet him back in the memorial building in three hours if that was agreeable.

Fifty acres of white symmetrical crosses; it seemed vast, "as far as the eye could see." Avenues of crisp white crosses, thousands of statistics and stories. I felt like a small insect crawling through a dream-city; how perfectly trimmed, how beyond reproach, what a self-sufficient entity. There was perfect silence. It was a beautiful, clear day, not cold or warm. What was it Harry Truman had said in his letter of consolation? *He stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die that freedom might live, and grow, and increase its blessings. Freedom lives, and through it, he lives—in a way that humbles the undertakings of most men.* What did he mean? What *possible* excuse?

I was in no hurry to find my father here. Death had leveled the worth of all these. And, besides, I knew he wasn't there. It was just a government's way to keep the records straight.

Still, when I did find it, there was a tremendous rush of chemistry: I had never been this close, in some inexplicable way, to touching him. I wept and lay down on the grave, falling asleep there as the sun came out and deepened my dreams. I saw my father in his B-17 still flying there "at about 15,000 ft." And then I came into view in some kind of plane, gaining on my father until I passed him, as in a cartoon, with scarf and goggles, waving. Why was I so sad? Why did I suddenly feel so old? When I awoke I took a color snapshot of the cross which said *Michael V. Woods, 1Lt 325 Bomb Sq. 92 Bomb GP (H) Missouri Apr 11 1944.* No birthdate.

When I returned to Kansas City my mother and I talked at length about the cemetery. I didn't mention what I learned from the man who escorted me at Neuville-en-Condroz. Instead, when I was alone, I sought out the old box of photos, letters, clippings. They always seemed new to me: there was a world there I could never finish understanding. But he was some letter writer, eight written to his bride in the last week of his life alone. The words were simple, striving for cheerfulness and optimism, and overflowing with declarations of love. In the last few hours of his life he wrote, "Gosh honey I'll be the happiest man in the world when this damn war is over and I get to come home to you and Tommy. So help me! I'm never going to have you out of my sight again." □

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PETER MAKUCK

A WALKABOUT

burning instead of beauty—Isaiah

In the last fires of October
I give my body its own head.

Rock rhythms from a high window
Beat the space between buildings.

I've been following a girl
With eyes as light blue as her jeans.

Grasshoppers flicker in the weeds
Behind the backstop carved with names.

Three or four rabbits flash white scuts
On the infield as if on a griddle.

A face in her face. Something more.
Drifting clouds don't understand

The drifting, the moods, a pine
Stiff in its hot black shadows.

Under the bleachers there's a ghost—
A girl in a noose, the kicking shade.

The sun slides a hand on my thigh.
The touch—it's her best souvenir.

But toward home, panic and heat
Are the oldest tokens of absence.

I enter at last by the gate
By the terrible sweet-burning mums

Guttering toward a winter gray
And everything racked with depth.

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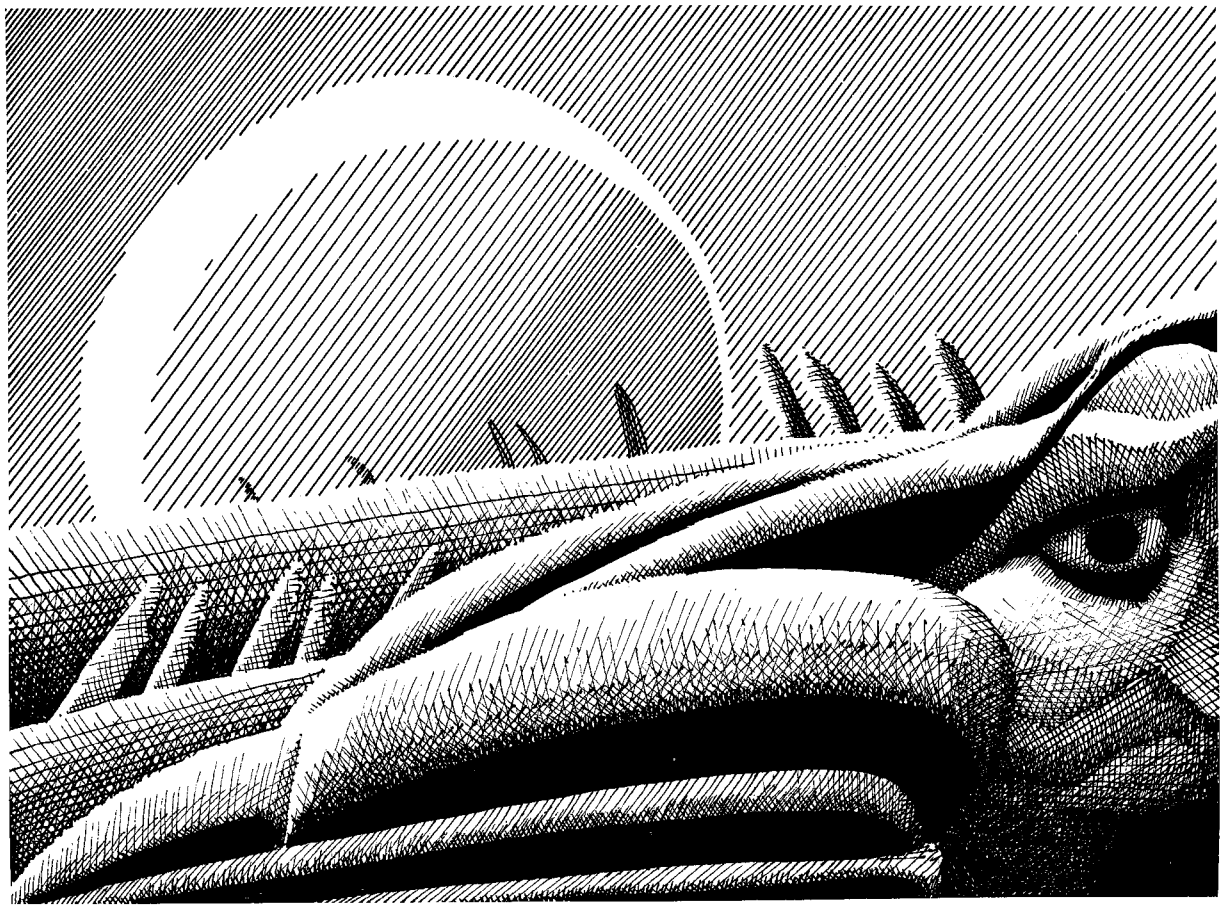

The argument: that life is bizarre, vicious, irrational, futile, and persistently unpleasant—as told by

Gerald Taaffe
Naomi Rothberg
Paul Zakaras
Kay Cassill
Chester Aaron
Dotty LeMieux
Marina Trenin

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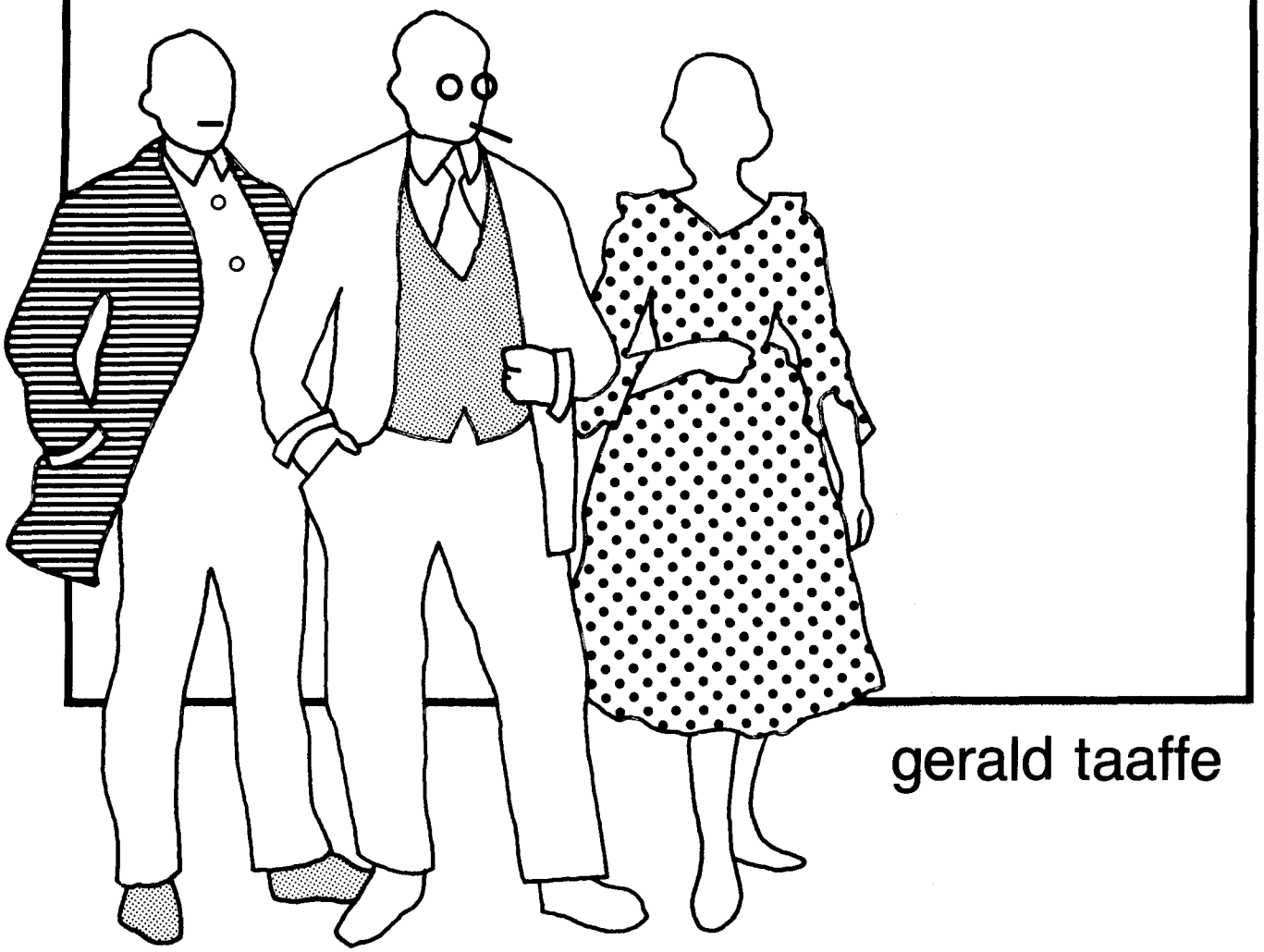
THE OFFICE PARTY



gerald taaffe

There was good reason to worry about Simon-Pierre. He was the fourth man from the top in our organization. Whatever it is that has been causing the deaths of our managers was a danger to him. In a way I feel responsible. As far as I know, I am the only one who can predict the deaths. I say nothing. It wouldn't do any good. It's too difficult to explain the symptoms. No one would believe my warnings.

I have wondered whether there is a conspiracy among the workers here, or among the other bosses. I don't think so. I would have had some clue by now. My job is to know all about our operation and to explain it to management, employees, government and the public. I have a staff of nine to help me in this, some of whom are quite good. They know that the hard part of a job like ours is to know what is going on within the organization. I believe it is Gregory Bateson who said that information is a difference that makes a difference. We operate on this principle. We don't accumulate vast files of data in my section. We look for significant things. For brochures, speeches and press releases we reduce as much information as possible about the organization to short simple sentences that anyone can understand. But we must know much, much more. We watch the organization as a fisherman watches a stream, not so much for the normal patterns of color and flow as for the fleeting, subtle things that show where a fish is feeding or might be feeding.

I am the best in the section at this kind of work. I am 36 years old as I write these lines. I have learned to use information from dreams and semi-conscious states to understand the things going on around me. I do this not to get some magical knowledge of the future or any such nonsense, but to know what I myself am feeling. In dreams and at semi-waking moments I find the meaning of elusive things that I have seen

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but not understood or wanted to understand. Of course, this isn't why I was hired. I have been a journalist and broadcaster. I know the field in which our organization works. I look healthy and have a cheerful manner. There were superficial reasons enough for them to think that I would be able to do the job, or what they thought was the job.

I hate my work. I have kept at it only because it has become a habit and because it has seemed to be a comparatively unobnoxious way to earn money in our corrupt society. I have a family that must be provided for, and am used to having at least some money in my pocket. What I live for are the times when I can do exactly what I want. I am a violent person. I need much more physical activity than I can possibly get while I am tied down to an office job. More important than this, I need time to gather in thoughts and sensations. I know this sounds vague. What it means is that my dreams and idle thoughts have become more and more jagged and disturbing since I've been working here. Other, more serene and enlightening thoughts are hovering around just beyond the point where I can gather them in. I sometimes see just enough of them to know that they are there, in a dream or when I am walking on one of those clean, cloudless days we have sometimes here in Ottawa. I believe that Aristotle had this in mind when he said that contemplation is the highest activity of man.

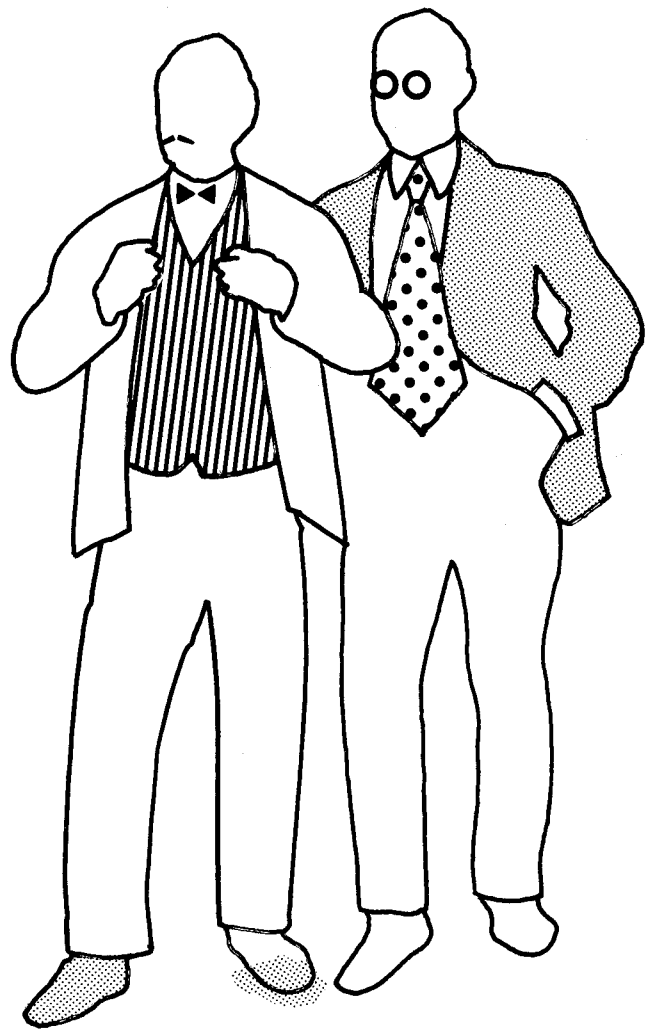
The morning of the party I saw Simon-Pierre in the fifth floor corridor. He was heading towards one of the conference rooms with a thick sheaf of polycopied agendas under his arm. It was early, about nine-thirty in the morning, which is when most of the endless series of formal meetings in our organization begin. At first I thought he looked well. I felt a surge of relief. There had been signs that he was falling apart. But his mustache, which had been getting sparser, seemed to be rich and full. I was going to suggest that he trim it, which would be what passes as a joke at the office, since I have a fine, bushy handlebar mustache myself.

As Simon-Pierre came closer I saw that he wasn't healthy at all. He seemed to have shrunk. At his best he was a small wiry man, full of energy. Now he looked shrivelled, much older than 47, which is the age for him that I had in my records. His skin was pale and glistening with sweat. For the first time I noticed that he was pockmarked, or at least seemed to be. I was wrong about the mustache. It had just about gone. There were only a few wisps of hair. At one end the mustache seemed to be growing inwards under a wart. He tried to smile. In his eyes there was an acceptance of something terrible.

He reminded me of the others. He looked worse than any of them had.

Our organization is one of those peculiar hybrids that spring up in Canada and other countries with governments on the British model. We spend government funds but are not a governmental department. Parliament and government cannot tell us what to do, although they could conceivably be so irritated by our actions that they would change the founding legislation or abolish our organization altogether. We are governed by a board of citizens appointed by the Cabinet who meet now and again at our offices in Ottawa to make decisions and formulate policy. Our goal is philanthropic. We make grants and help coordinate private activities in a field that most prosperous people in the community think is a valuable one. To say more would be to name the organization, since there are only a half-dozen of the kind in Ottawa, and of course only one in our particular field. It is not essential to understanding my story.

GERALD TAAFFE grew up in Chicago, and now works in Ottawa as a free-lance writer. Recent fiction of his has appeared in Tamarack Review *and the* Canadian Fiction Magazine.



In the early seventies we began to receive much larger annual grants from the government. Our staff began to grow. By the time the deaths began, we had 350 people on the payroll. We consulted hundreds of outside experts as well. We were three times as big an organization as we had been four years before, when I was hired. We moved into new offices. They called it a "landscaped office environment." Only the top two men have real offices with walls and doors. For everyone else, there are wall-to-wall carpets and movable eye-high partitions covered in beige or rust-colored fabric. A large number of potted rubbery plants have been placed in between the partitions. They wither by the desks of the discontented, and flourish in those few spots where they find either a happy employee or one who lavishes love and care on them. Voices are hushed, although an indiscreet phrase sometimes sails

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across the floor to dozens of ears during one of those silences when all the clatterings of typewriters and Xerox machines suddenly stop.

Philip was the first to die. It happened a month after our move to new offices. He was the Managing Director. He had been with our organization since 1960, when it was decreed into existence. He loved and respected the people in the field we helped, and was sensitive to their needs. He made our organization into a moral force in the country. He was in his mid-fifties when he died. He was tall and a little soft around the middle. He was from Halifax, from an old family which had made its fortune by exploiting the fishermen of the Atlantic Provinces. He had been educated at Cambridge and had stayed on in Britain until after the war. He was a playwright, or at least it was as a playwright that he defined himself, since, as far as I know, only one of his plays was produced, and that was in 1938, in London. He wouldn't admit to having written others since then, although I know from a number of allusions he made to nameless authors that he had in fact written at least one more and was constantly thinking of the day when he would once again be revealed as a playwright.

I dreaded seeing Philip during his last months. He could still be humorous or suddenly brusque, but there was always a pleading in his eyes. I knew he was suffering and would soon die. There was nothing I could do about it. I am ill at ease with authority. I don't like being subject to it, and refuse to exercise it. I am classified as a section-head here, but I have tried to organize my group so that no one ever orders anyone else to do anything. With Philip I would be very uncomfortable when we weren't talking about a specific work problem.

As far as I know, I was the last person to see him alive. It was close to noon when I was called to his office that day. I found him sitting at his desk in semi-darkness. He showed me a newspaper article. "Should we worry about this?" he asked. I told him no, as he obviously knew I would. It was a mild criticism of our organization, the kind that gets no public or political support. I had brought a thick file on current problems with me. He wasn't interested in them.

He went over to a little refrigerator hidden behind an abstract sculpture. "Would you like a martini?" he asked. I didn't. I had stopped drinking a few months before. He mixed himself one and brought it over to a couch. He motioned for me to sit near him. Through a small gap where two of the heavy window-curtains joined I caught a glimpse of the river below the Chaudiere Falls. In the rapids huge chunks of ice were being swept downstream. During the last weeks, Philip always kept the curtains closed.

"I've been watching you, too," he said.

"Why me?" I asked. I tried to make a joke of it. I actually blushed, which is a rare thing.

"You see a lot," he answered, "but you don't see everything. Basically you see this organization as futile and me as a failure."

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

He raised his voice. "Don't be coy. Listen to me. It's important. Just listen to me, will you?"

I nodded. His skin was very pale. There were beads of sweat on his upper lip. His hands were shaking.

"Is it true? Is that what you think?"

"Not quite," I said. "I think that you've come as close as anyone could to making something useful out of an outfit like ours."

"Then I was right. I've known how you felt for a long time. You're right, too, as far as it goes. But you haven't gone far enough. Mind you, it helped, seeing that you felt as you did. It helped. I'm a failure. You're right about that much of it."

"You're not finished yet," I said. "You can't be a failure." He ignored that. I must have spoken faintly. I didn't believe it myself. I would have liked to reach out and touch him in some way. In other circumstances I believe I could have. I was locked into the framework of the organization as much as he was.

Philip continued: "This organization exists for one reason only. Some day on one of our desks the message will come. It may be scrawled in an almost illegible hand on paper torn from a child's exercise book. It may be grotesque. It will be from the one who imprints his name on the century. It won't be me. I know that. What we exist for is not to miss it."

"That's just the one we will miss," I said. "Whoever it is will get a form-letter and a thick sheaf of brochures. That will be the end of it as far as we're concerned."

"*You* won't forget, will you?"

"No," I said. I was going to say more, but he interrupted me.

"I've heard enough," he said. "You may be right about that, too."

"Maybe something could be done," I said.

"Thank you for coming," he said. He put his glass down on the coffee table and stretched out on the couch. In the dim room his face was very pale. He died within the next few hours. The story is that his secretary found the body stretched out on the floor by his desk. The death was attributed to a heart attack.

In less than three months after he had taken over Philip's duties, René died as well. The symptoms were so similar that I wondered why no one else noticed it. René was a gentle man. He was from a family of prosperous Quebec lawyers and judges. He wasn't very good at the job. In the Fifties he had written a few exquisite volumes of neo-imagist verse illustrated by his own engravings. He had won a few minor literary prizes for them in Paris and Brussels, as well as the highest awards Canada has to offer. When he stopped writing, he became the French-Canadian second-in-command in a number of Federal organizations where his shyness was highly prized. He would make elegantly phrased public statements on cultural matters, and the expression "*prudent comme un René R.*" became a commonplace among scornful French-Canadian literary commentators.

During the last weeks of his regime, his forehead and upper lip would always be beaded with sweat. To the proposals I would bring before him he gave assent with a gentle, condescending smile and the words, "*très bien,*" said with a rising inflection on the first word, as you would distractedly congratulate a small child on still another scribbled drawing. I saw that he was suffering horribly, but he never complained. I once tried to warn him, but even my first tentative probings frightened him. It must have been the tone of my voice. He became paler even than usual. He asked me to leave and close the door behind me.

René was found dead in the garage beneath our new office building. He was lying with a fractured skull at the foot of a

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small flight of concrete steps. The story was that he had been working late and simply slipped and fell on the way to his car. There was no autopsy or coroner's inquest.

In the next two deaths there were once again the same basic symptoms, the haunted, distracted look and the constant sweating. There was something new as well. One grew very thin. She was the only woman among the managers of our organization. She began to keep jars of candy in her office and nibbled constantly at them. She was a woman of about 50 who had been what is called a "productive scholar" before taking up an administrative career. The other victim grew fat and puffy. He complained a lot about the organization, which was unlike the others. He was from a French-speaking part of Manitoba, another former scholar, and was only in his early thirties when he died.

Most of the girls in the office were excited about the party. It was the first time that all employees and not just the bosses had been invited to one of the organization's social functions. It wasn't really clear why the party was to take place. The idea seemed to have grown by itself. As far as there was a purpose, it was to introduce the staff to some newly appointed members of the governing board—or so I speculated, since no official reason had been given.

One of the girls came into my office to thank me formally. She did the same twice a year, when she received her salary increases, and on other occasions when the organization provided her with some benefit. I told her, as I always did on such occasions, that I had nothing to do with it, decisions of that kind weren't in my hands, and that whatever she got she had earned. She was the secretary of Marcel, who is shown in the official table of organization as my second-in-command. I had tried to abolish secretaries and authority in the section, but Suzette and Marcel had quietly resisted. He likes giving orders, and she likes taking them. They work together at a number of routine jobs, which keeps them busy and doesn't interfere much with the rest of us.

Suzette is an eager girl. She never walks on an assignment when she can run. If she has any intelligence, she has never given any sign of it at the office. She's a redhead with very pale skin which itself turns flaming red whenever she has made a mistake or transgressed her own very rigid code of master-subordinate etiquette. She's a French-Canadian from Ottawa, like most of the clerical staff in our scrupulously bilingual organization. She's part of a network of secretaries and clerks who share her outlook on authority and in other sections of the organization do most of the work.

Simon-Pierre's face and the faces of the dead ones kept coming to mind the day of the party. A reporter from a newspaper in Winnipeg kept me on the line for an hour that morning. He was trying to do an exposé story about our organization, but didn't know anything about us or our work. I explained our complicated structure and programs to him in detail, and finally he dropped the idea altogether. The doodling I had done during the talk was of decomposing faces. A sheaf of pink phone messages had accumulated on the desk during the talk. The boss wanted to see me. Two of the people in my section had things to talk over. There was a call from a Montreal TV station. By the time I went out for lunch my body seemed to have disappeared. I felt that I had forgotten things and had been humiliated in a number of subtle ways. I was compressed into a small knot of worry located behind the bridge of the nose. As I was leaving, my eye was caught by the sheet of sketches I had done during the long phone talk. I crumpled it up and threw it in the wastebasket. For a moment tears tried to force themselves to the surface.

As usual, I walked down the ten flights of stairs from my office. I wasn't aware of moving at all. On the street I hardly knew where I was going. Only the small knot of worry existed. A girl in a long blue cape blocked the way. She was one of the Process workers who came down from Toronto most week days to gain money and souls for the new religion. Her face was lean and lined, like a cowboy's. She had a British accent and a slight, engaging lisp. I took note of these things before I understood what she was saying. Then I made contact with her blue, intense eyes. I felt the beginning of relief. I told her, "I could hardly see or hear you."

"You didn't want to," she said.

"I couldn't. It's hard to describe."

"You're a good man," she told me. "You could do a lot of good." In her eyes there was what looked like disinterested love. She put her hands on my temples. I could feel the flow of strength from them. I felt it even while thinking what a cliché the experience was. I drew in nourishment from her eyes. I felt my whole body again. The Process girl and I both began to cry. We turned away from each other and went off in different directions.

I decided to go swimming after all. It was late, after two. Ordinarily I would have foregone it and eaten something quick at Woolworth's. But for the moment at least my mind had been wiped clean. It was a bright day, mild for late March in Ottawa. I ran the three blocks to the Chateau Laurier. On the way, a smiling, graceful girl looked over at me, and our eyes met in a moment of sweet accord. There was no one else in the pool at the hotel. I did thirty lengths. Sometimes I churned up the water into little choppy waves with an energetic butterfly stroke. Or glided along on my back until the water became calm and mirrorlike. I let myself sink to the bottom of the pool and walked a few steps, which makes me feel that the laws of gravity have been temporarily repealed.

On my way out of the hotel I let my eye fall on the events board in the lobby. Our organization's party was listed, as I would have known had I been thinking of it. I went to a coffeehouse near the hotel. I could still feel in my limbs the euphoria of swimming, but my mind was beginning to contract. I ate quickly. The first few sips of espresso made me sweat. I ran back to the office against a wind that had become sharp and cold.

A big noisy crowd of people was already at the party when I arrived. There were many faces I didn't recognize, probably husbands and wives of employees. There was no mingling between groups that I could see. Immediately I began to think about how soon I could decently leave. I saw Simon-Pierre standing by himself. His face was twisted in what looked like a grimace of pain. I moved towards him. He looked over and shook his head. He lifted his palm in a gesture that told me to stay away. His mouth formed the words, "Watch out." It was difficult to move through the crowded room. The new Managing Director caught my arm. He introduced me to his wife. When I was able to free myself, Simon-Pierre was nowhere in sight. I searched until I was sure that he had left the room.

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Someone put their hand on my arm. The contact made the flesh rise up the arm and down the back. There was a prickling in the scalp. It was a girl from the accounting section whom I had often stopped to joke with when I went down to get my cheque. Her welcoming smile had frozen. I couldn't think of anything better than to ask her if she had seen Simon-Pierre. She hadn't. At the first excuse, she turned away. She's an intelligent, very attractive girl, and these days she looks the other way when I go down to the accounting office.

I had to get away from the party. I went down the corridor to check the men's room for Simon-Pierre. He wasn't there. I explored the corridor. Ours seemed to be the only party going that afternoon. The other convention rooms were dark and silent. I sat down in a big leather chair. Only a murmur from our party came to this part of the floor. I lit a cigar and thought about Simon-Pierre.

Ordinarily there was something a little comical about him. He looked at the same time like Cardinal Richelieu and a cartoon drawing of a fox. He had a long, delicate nose, twisted as all such fine French noses seem to be. His lips were thin. At first look, you'd expect him to be refined and supercilious. But Simon-Pierre was the son of a farmer. He was born and raised in the remote Lac St. Jean region of Quebec. He had been a major in the army. There was an unmistakable rural twang in his voice whether he spoke English or French.

In my first months with the organization, Simon-Pierre and I had had a few head-on arguments. But I soon saw that what seemed like blustering on his part was only an attempt to protect the interests of the people we helped and of his own staff. He was a fast talker, but not very articulate. Our differences had been simple misunderstandings. He couldn't hide a kindness and vulnerability that made it painful at times to meet his eye.

It didn't take me long to piece together his background from small things he let drop. He had studied briefly for the priesthood, and then later enlisted in the fight against Hitler. Both times he had been disillusioned. He had taken up his job with our organization in the conviction that here at last was a place where he could do good in the world.

A sound of voices speaking softly came from one of the nearby convention rooms. I must have been sitting alone in the corridor for more than half an hour. I had finished one cigar and was halfway through another. I went over and looked in the room. There on a low circular stage was a car. It wasn't a new one, as you'd expect in the circumstances. It was a Pontiac, at least a year old. There was grime on the hubcaps and fenders. The car had a mud-spattered set of Quebec license plates.

The door was closed behind me. I made no move to go out. I felt a peculiar kind of helplessness, as in dreams, when you can't move away from a slowly approaching destructive force. As my eyes grew used to the darkness around the brightly lit platform I recognized people from our organization. Suzette and a number of her friends were there, and the new Managing Director. There were the hotel people who handle our parties, the Assistant Catering Manager and two waiters.

The low murmur of voices in the room suddenly stopped. Four enormous men came out from behind a curtain stretched in back of the stage. They wore only loincloths. Their skins were oiled, so that you could see the play of muscles at their slightest movement. Their heads were shaved bare. Each of them carried a sledgehammer on his shoulder, as a soldier on parade holds his rifle. I knew then what was going to happen. I knew that it was Simon-Pierre's car on the circular stage.

The room was suddenly suffused with soft lighting, making the spotlight less harsh. I saw the Assistant Catering Manager at the switchbox. I recognized more people from our organization. There were clerks and section-heads. Marlene, Simon-Pierre's assistant, was there. The men with sledgehammers stationed themselves at the four corners of the car. There was a terrible explosion of violence. It couldn't have taken them more than two minutes to reduce the car to a mass of twisted metal.

The four men quickly disposed of the wrecked car. It had been standing on a big piece of red canvas. They folded the ends of the heavy cloth over the remains of the car and dragged it out behind the curtain. Two hotel waiters came forward with another piece of red canvas and unrolled it on the platform. They withdrew quickly and took up their posts at the back of the room. Simon-Pierre came out and stood under the spotlight. The soft lights faded out. He was suffering. His skin was very pale and glistening with sweat. There was no anger or defiance in him. He looked even more resigned than he had earlier in the evening. The soft lights went back on. The four men with sledgehammers came out and surrounded him. Simon-Pierre stared straight ahead. The room was very quiet.

Suddenly there was a loud sobbing. It was Suzette. As though it were a signal, she and the other office girls rushed to the front of the room. They screamed and groaned and wrung their hands. They writhed in grief. Everyone else watched impassively. My own expression must have been impassive. I was glad that someone was protesting. For a moment I thought that it might change the course of things. But it didn't. I realized that the girls' grief was part of the event. It was a simple convention that changed nothing. I left the room as the men lifted their sledgehammers. No one tried to stop me. The girls screamed louder. I heard only a small sound of iron against flesh and bone. It's something that will remain with me always.

Once I was in the corridor, full freedom of movement came back. I ran, hands over my ears. Only when I was in the stairway, the thick glass door closed behind me, was I free of the noises from the execution room. I didn't think of reporting the execution. What I remembered was the warning Simon-Pierre had delivered to me. I sat down in one of the recessed windows in the marble stairway. I knew that I was still in danger. For some reason, I was sure that I'd escape. I went out of the hotel and began to walk.

I had already come close to being one of the victims. Fourteen months before the office party I had made a radical change in my habits and ways of thinking. Now I saw that it had been a stay of execution. I had been grossly overweight. I had been drinking too much. Every afternoon I would work late in the office. Anxiety would make it hard for me to go to sleep at night, and in the early morning I would wake up full of ideas about how to cope with things at work. At all times a nameless anguish hovered over me. In the mirror I would see a face bloated out of shape by fat and worry. The face was pale and often there was sweat on the upper lip and temples. All the symptoms were there.

The first step was to stop drinking. Once the decision was

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made, I had no temptation to go back on it. I began to do morning exercises, go for long runs, go swimming at the Chateau. I paid more attention to what I ate. Muscles rose out of the fat like long-lost islands. I was often able to take an easier attitude towards work. More important, I admitted to myself that my job was useless except as a means of gaining money. In some way, the organization was an enemy to be kept at bay by any means possible.

This may sound more successful than it in fact was. The danger isn't gone. Every afternoon at the office, even on what seem to be good days, I feel indescribably sad. It's as though a heavy weight is bearing down, not on the hard skull-covering, but directly on the brain. A thin finger of work-anxiety can poke in at me even when I think I am absorbed in other, more human things. It can spread through my mind like a cancer. It can still make me break out in clammy sweat.

For some time now I have been alert to symptoms of the kind I saw in Philip and the others. I see them in men coming out of office buildings with expensive brief cases. I can't go with friends to the "happy hour" in bars downtown. There are too many faces marked for quick deaths. Being able to identify them makes me feel as though I am responsible. I feel that I am looking over a crowd of hostages, picking out the ones who are to be executed. I know that there is nothing to be gained from getting another job in another organization.

When I got home the night of the party I heard a report of Simon-Pierre's death on the radio. The Pontiac had been found smashed into a guard-rail of the McDonald-Cartier Bridge. The body was almost unrecognizable. At the office the next day I had to write the official letter of condolence to the widow from the Governing Board. It was the fifth letter of the kind I had written. The story circulating around the office was that he had left the party early. He had been on his way home. It would have been unwise for me to say anything about what I had seen. I might have lost faith in it completely if I hadn't found out that there had been no witness to a crash on the bridge. Of course I reason that it couldn't have happened, even when the sounds of the execution come back vividly to my memory.

The doubts don't change anything. I have to leave. I've given notice. There is a month left to go as I write these lines. When the organization starts probing at my brain now, I just leave the office. If it gets me in the morning, I stay home for the day.

Yesterday afternoon I went down to the Rideau River near Strathcona Park. It was a warm day. I lay still in the grass by the slow-flowing river for a while until things became intensely real and one by one absorbed my attention. There was the play of the breeze on the grass, the complex movement of the stalks, or a single stalk bobbing sporadically. There were low-lying purple vetches and little miniature buttercups on bare stalks. There were colonies of aphids, small ants and preposterous little winged insects. A dragon-fly paused in flight. Devils-darning-needles hovered in two's over the arrowheads in the shallow water, joined in wedlock so often that at first you wonder if they aren't made in strange configurations of head-wing-tail-head-wing-tail. Sunfish and minnows kissed the air, breaking the surface tension of the water. Beyond them, putting everything into a different perspective, the river flowed, never the same and unchanging, reflecting clouds and sky one moment, a flock of pigeons or a solitary, wheeling hawk the next. And then there was nothing, only the mind fed by everything the eyes have seen and full of pleasures that have no limit in space and time.

As the sun was going down I finally let myself cry about Philip, Simon-Pierre and the others. I stayed there a long time weeping like a madman. I went back to the house and began to write this document. I want it to be a memorial and a warning. □

LUCY SWOPE

NOON

Aware
of the palpable weight of the heat through the window
she stretches,
and turns belly-up to the sun. She drifts
on the tide of her dreams. She dreams of men.
Men rising like the sun or like clouds sinking
their damp weight, their damp regular breath slowly
into her.

The men of her dreams waver and dissolve.
She watches through slitted eyes
sparrows gather on the venous branches of the elm.

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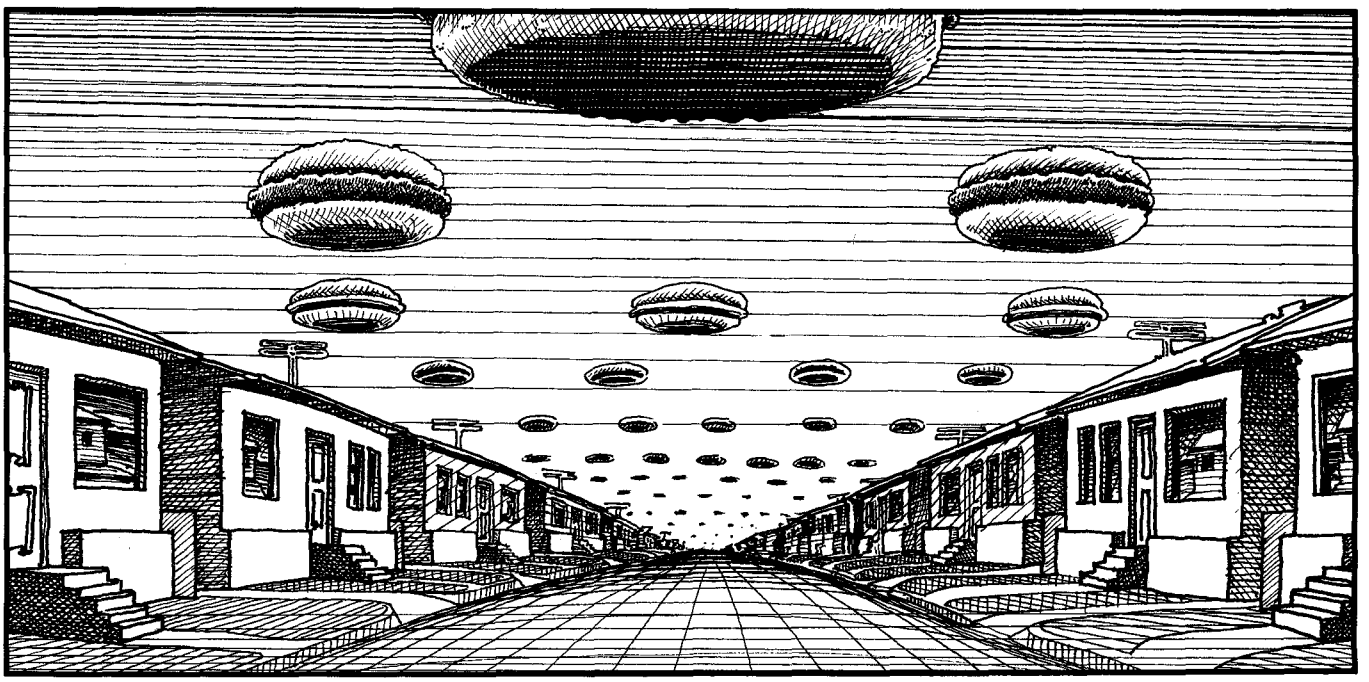

FAMILY LIFE

by Naomi Rothberg

I took Nedra in there because she spotted the big 'M' and immediately started clamoring for Ronald McDonald, how this might be the one where he was and how did I know he wasn't and maybe maybe maybe. So I gave in.

She won't ever touch their rotten hamburgers. But I thought, what the hell, so her lunch will be a bag of french fries. I'll sprinkle protein extract on everything she eats for supper tonight.

Once inside she peered among all the subnormals behind the counter, looking for him. She won't ask. She has that much sophistication, to know Ronald McDonald is very *unlikely* to be anywhere she is and that grown-ups will snicker at a child who expects him. But still it's been *sworn* to her he's *not* a cartoon, he's a real man who shows at certain places at certain times. So she looks around carefully. (The Impossible Dream, right? A swell of music, please.) For this time, she gives up.

I order. Standing there I swear I did notice a mildly perverted-looking type giving me the eye. I paid it no attention. He was ordering. I was ordering. He looked at me. I looked at him. That *I* thought he looked with special interest, I dismissed. I know I'm paranoid; I have to ignore these intuitions. And I walked by and over to the booth Nedra had chosen. Where she was up on the table pretending to swim.

She got to her knees and started snatching french fries out of the bag as soon as I got to her.

"Wait until I set them down. And get onto the seat or you won't get any. Now, you can eat five of these but then you have to take two bites of that hamburger."

She wasn't going to touch the hamburger.

She climbed down and grabbed again for the potatoes. At this point I noticed the bearded kid. He was one booth ahead of us, to Nedra's back, had a beard as I say and long long frizzy pale hair remarkably like hers. I was actually looking at *her* and thinking *her* hair had pulled out of the braids I made such a short time ago, and was sticking out around her head in disorder—which irritated me—when I realized it was the kid behind her. Funny!

I went on a whole trip then, congratulating myself; thinking how ugly he looked whereas I made Nedra absolutely adorable, and the secret was control. That kind of hair looks great under control, and first I cut her Afro, which looked nice but took, I found, too much maintenance. So I started braiding it pickaninny style.

(Edward hadn't seen it like that 'til this morning. He grabs me by the arm—a tiger, you know, he-man: "It's not bad enough you bring her in to testify against her own father, do you have to make her look like a freak too!"

She looked adorable. Pious Edward of course was all set

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to charge *me* with desertion so he could worm out of paying, never *mind* in that case this poor-little-child-to-be-protected-at-all-costs would then get shucked off to day care so I could go out to work.)

Anyway, the scene is, we're eating. We've been eating. I am just crumpling up the greased paper the french fries have been lying on and about to tell her "You can't have any of that milk-shake until you eat two bites of the hamburger" when I feel someone at my side.

It's the pervert. Shit, I think, I really must put out something they like.

He smiles and makes a little bow with his head the way they do. He's about 45 or 48. *Clean*. His crummy Korvette's jacket must still have a laundry ticket in it. Or he pried it off an hour ago. "Pardon," he says. Very softly. "The young man in the booth ahead of you is all by himself. I wonder if you would have the kindness to join him."

I was expecting Where was I from, or Had I enjoyed the meal. I didn't take it in.

"Do you understand?" he says.

"No, I'm sorry."

"The young man in the booth ahead of you is all by himself. He must be lonely. Would you and the little girl join him?"

"I don't know him. We're not together."

"I guessed that, but you do seem compatible. I have a sixth sense for these things. I'd appreciate it a lot."

I stared at him.

"What's he saying, Mommy?"

"I'm sorry," I said, "I don't have any connection with him at all."

"I am asking you to *make* a connection. Out of kindness."

Again I just stared at him.

"Talk louder," Nedra said. "I can't hear you." She pulled up across the table again.

"Listen," I said to the man in a carefully courteous way I've had occasion to use before, "I'm sure you have some interesting ideas about these things, but we're just about to leave."

"I didn't have my milk-shake," Nedra wails.

"Madam. . . ."

"I'm sorry," I said, "we're in something of a rush," and to her, "we'll take the milk-shake to the car." I started fumbling with the plastic cover. I couldn't find the hole to stick the straw through. "No," she's crying, "I won't be able to see it!"

"Madam," he says, "I'm going to have to insist."

I look at him to see what expression accompanies that statement. And he's pointing his pocket at me. I couldn't *believe* it! Picture it! We're sitting in the middle of McDonald's, in broad daylight!

"*What* are you insisting on?"

"Please lower your voice. I don't want anyone at all to get hurt. Get up and move over to the booth where that young man is sitting."

Nedra turns around to look at the kid behind her. He winks and she says to him, "Can I drink my milk-shake opened?"

"Madam?" the maniac says. Like a butler. And I'm thinking, this is it; this is what it's like just before they open fire and blast to pieces a dozen people they never heard of before.

"Yes," I say, "okay. Fine.

"Nedra," I say. I take hold of my coat and slide out of my seat. The man steps back to let me move. I grab Nedra's arm (she grabs the milk-shake), move my body between her and the guy. Then I had to let my coat slip to the floor so I could reach across her and get her coat without letting go of her arm. "You're *pinching* me," she says. I got both coats up then and sort of dragged her sideways to the other booth, where the kid is staring at us.

I consider that the kid may be working with this man. He slightly resembles Edward, so I consider he may be some relative and this a put up job.

"Please finish your hamburger," the man said to him.

He was just a kid.

Nedra pulled herself away from me furiously and climbed into the new booth. I perched at the edge of the seat. I was staring back at the kid E.S.P. messages that went Do Something, Do Something. But it was ridiculous. His eyes went from me to the man and back again, while the hamburger in his hands slowly sank to the cardboard box it had come from. "Excuse me?" he said.

"Please finish your hamburger and come with us."

I almost screamed. He was taking us *out*? What had we done? The kid's long hair, the way I dressed—had we offended him? Did he kill hippie freaks? That sort of thing I thought was passé, but we were in Plainfield, there was culture lag, maybe it had just caught on with the maniacs out here.

I craned around to see the other booths. There were at least a dozen people in the place. Mostly women, but some of them big.

"Please cooperate with me. I don't want to hurt you."

Hijackers said that, did murderers say it too? But I had Nedra with me, surely he knew she wasn't responsible for the way she looked. Everyone excused little children. He. . . . It occurred to me it was Nedra he wanted. I must have made a sudden move, because he stuck the pocket closer to me and said again, more tensely, "Cooperate with me, I don't want to hurt you."

"Don't hurt my *child*," I whispered back through my teeth. "I'll do anything you want. I have three hundred dollars with me. I'll give you anything in the world to let us go!"

"I would never hurt a child. I don't want your money. Are you finished eating?" This last to the kid.

"You gotta be outta your mind," the kid said. And stopped. An expression of blank, incredulous terror took over his face. The man told the kid we would all leave now. And then, when the kid didn't move, he motioned with his pocket.

It was perfectly possible, I thought, there was no gun. If I rushed past him now and yelled for help he would run away. Even if he had the gun he might not shoot; it could be he never *would* hurt a child. Some killers wouldn't. Canaries or kittens or dogs. Would he shoot a child's mother?

"Madam, I am growing impatient!"

The kid was standing then. He was taller than the man.

"Put your coat on."

The kid put his coat on. I put on mine. Nedra abandoned about an inch of milk-shake and let me push her arms

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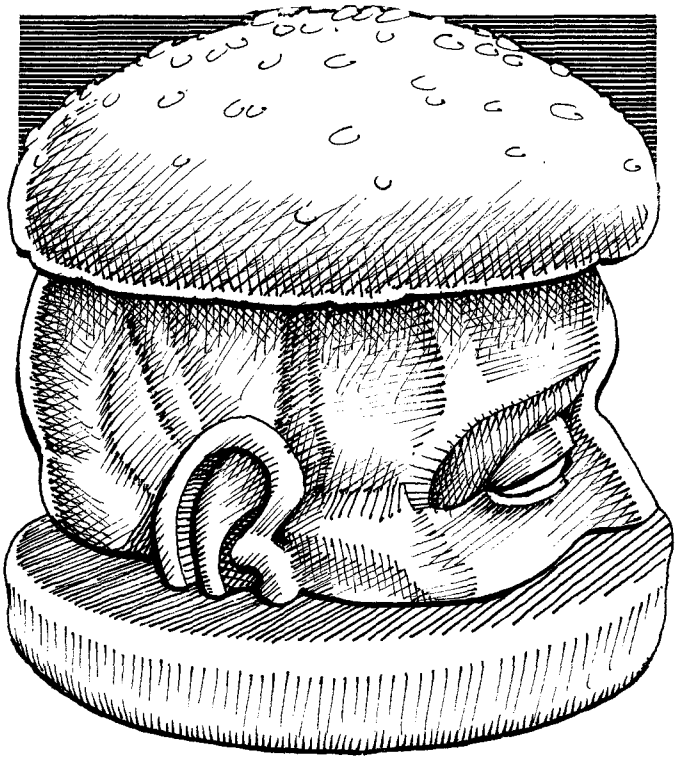

into her sleeves and zip her without protest. She understood something. My sweet, intelligent Neddie! I dropped my head suddenly onto hers, knowing the incredible tenderness and smoothness of her limbs, knowing how pleased she was with the lace trim on her new undershirt.

"Madam," he said, "do not make me angry."

Who could know what he would do if I yelled!

He walked us out the door, and no one looked. He walked us right past my car. To an old green sedan. The inside was immaculate, as free of any personal junk as a rental. But baby-shoes hung on the mirror and seeing them I sobbed and crushed Nedra onto my lap.

None of us made a sound after that. He got off the main highway and drove in and out of little towns. I thought he was circling. Then he drove up and down the streets of a neighborhood of small, crummy development houses. Just as I guessed he was closing in, he pulled up in front of a pink place with a white fence. There was a collie chained to a post at the side, next to a very white doghouse that had *Champion* written over the doorway. The dog jumped up and barked and the man waved to him and said, "It's okay, boy, hold on now."

He handed me a key. I missed the lock three times before I opened his front door. Inside everything was absolute cleanliness, absolute order, plastic slipcovers. I almost vomited. I knew this is how maniacs live.

He herded us into a livingroom with a fake fireplace burning a fake log and milk glass roosters and things on shelves. There was a spinning wheel end table.

"Take off your coats," he said. Please please, I prayed, just let it be sex. Please. Please just sex.

He took the coats and backed out the livingroom door to a table just outside. I could see him neatly folding them all. When he came back the gun was in his hand.

"Now," he said, so softly the boy beside me cupped his hand around his ear. "Please step onto the rug."

Behind us was an oval hooked rug. My heart was slamming around in my chest as though it was trying to get out. Did he want me to fuck the boy? Was *he* going to do us all? Don't hurt Neddie *I would never hurt a child* I saw myself naked on my knees screaming No, you promised, and the boy in blood beside me and my baby running to me screaming with terror.

"Young man, I am going to call you Bob. This is Elizabeth. Bob, will you put your arm around Elizabeth."

Nedra smiled, because she recognized a game when she saw one. The boy tried to say something and tried to put his arm around me. But he couldn't do either.

"Put your arm around her waist!"

"It's better if you don't shout," Nedra said.

The boy's arm fumbled around me and we were staring into each other's eyes. I saw his redden and tears swelled up into the corners and filled in along the rims.

"Mommy, he shouldn't point a gun at anyone."

"Shush, Neddie, please please shush."

"Bob, close the top button of your shirt. Elizabeth, you put your head against Bob's chest."

His heart felt like mine.

"Well it's bad isn't it, Mommy, to point a gun at someone?"

"Now, Elizabeth, place your hand on his chest too. No, open it."

"Mommeee!"

"Open the palm. Palm flat on his chest. Lower. Not *that* low; stop it! That's better. Angle it more to the right, so it curves around his ribs."

"*Mommeee answer me!*"

"Neddie. . . ."

"Don't talk to her!"

"That's not nice! You're talking mean! Isn't he?"

"Neddie *please*!"

"Put your HEAD back on his chest! Little girl, if you don't do as you're told I'll have to spank you.

"Put your HEAD BACK on his chest!"

"You can't spank me! You're not my Mommy!"

"Sir," I said, my voice all over the place, "Sir, my husband is expecting us home already. He's very very very nervous about us if we're late even a minute. He's so nervous he'll come out looking. . . ."

"Stop it," he said. "Bob here is your husband. Look at him. Lovingly. Kiss his cheek." (The boy's cheek was wet.) "Run your fing. . . .

"WHY DON'T YOU GET A HAIRCUT!" he screamed.

Both of us leaped in panic. We grabbed each other for real then and tears burst down the boy's face. Nedra pushed her face against my thigh.

"Stop that crying! Stop it!"

I seized the boy's head in my hands and kissed his eyes rapidly.

"All right," the man said, "stop that, *too*. Good enough. Get back in your positions."

Nedra was clutching me harder. I reached down quickly and stroked her hair.

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"Let Bob do that. Put your hand on the little girl's head, Bob. That's it, on her head. Okay. Now listen to me. Hold that and listen exactly to me. Say this. Say, 'Home at long last! It feels like it's been a year!' "

Nothing. The beat of his heart.

"Say it," I whispered.

"*Obey me*! You say, 'Home at long last! It feels like it's been a year!' "

"Home at long last. . . ." We waited.

" *'It feels like it's been a year!'* "

"It feels like it's been a year."

"SAY THE WHOLE THING DO I HAVE TO BEAT IT OUT OF YOU?"

"Home at last. . . ."

" 'Home at LONG last!' " He was shrieking.

I cried, "Let *me* say it."

"No! *He* has to say it!" His face was wild and he held the gun outstretched toward us. Nedra was weeping, clinging to my thigh with her whole strength. I thought, God let it be fast.

"Home at long last," the boy said. "It feels like it's been a year!"

The man's arm relaxed. His face slowly melted back to its normal shape. He took a couple of long, shaky breaths.

The boy said it again, "Home at long last. It feels like it's been a year!"

"Good. Elizabeth, you look up at him with your eyes really big and say, 'You come home to a new car all dented. I'm sorry, Bob!' "

"You come home to a new car all dented. I'm sorry, Bob."

"Don't let your voice tremble like that. Keep your hand on the little girl's head, Bob. Draw her closer."

"Nedra, stay here!"

"Stay there, little girl!"

"Stay here, sweetheart, don't cry, I'll explain it all to you soon. Everything will be all right, do what Mommy says."

"Bob, say: 'You shouldn't have worried your silly head about it.' "

"You shouldn't have worried your silly head about it."

" 'Oh, Bob, you're so understanding.' "

"Oh, Bob, you're so understanding."

" 'Bethie, what's a dented car?' "

"Bethie, what's a dented car?"

" 'To a man with two such beautiful women.' "

"To a man with two such beautiful women."

" 'Oh, Bob'—Don't look at me—'I'm. . .so. . .lucky.' " He had his prick in his hand.

"Oh, Bob, I'm so lucky."

" 'No, Bethie, *I'm* the lucky one.' "

"No, Bethie, I'm the lucky one."

"Kiss her nose. 'And I'm *starved!* Where's my dinner?' "

"And I'm starved! Where's my dinner!"

" 'Bob, love you.' "

"Bob, I love you."

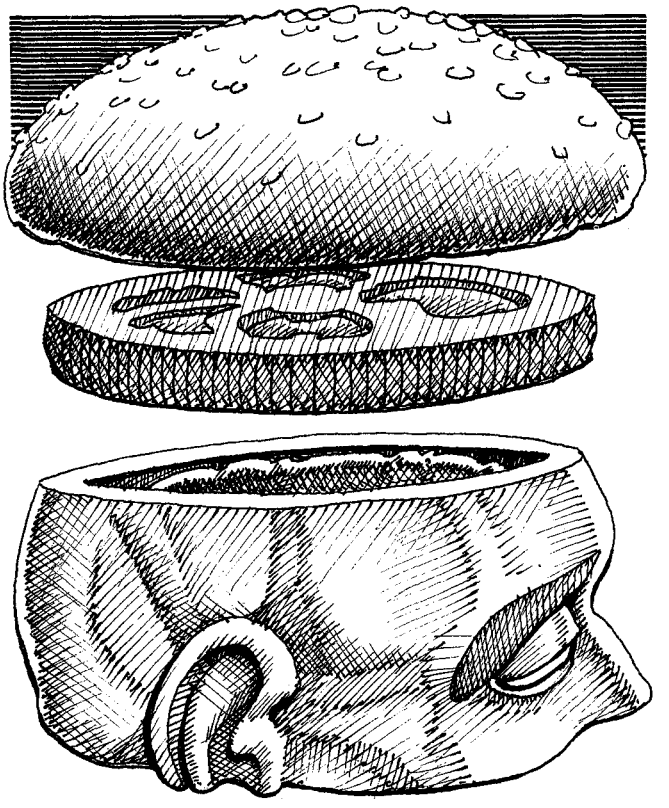
" 'Bob, I love you.' "

"Bob, I love you."

" 'Bob, I love you.' "

"Bob, I love you."

" 'BOB,' " he screamed, " 'I LOVE YOU.' " Come



spurted onto his hand, his pants, onto the varnished floor. He sank against the wall, still pulling it. "Bob," he groaned, "I love you."

"Bob," I said, "I love you."

He slipped to his knees just one side of the door, his eyes closed, the gun held limp in his free hand. "Thank you," he whispered.

"Thank you," we said.

"You may all go now." His eyes stayed closed and he spoke in a dreamy sing-song way: "Remember that I have the gun. Please lock the door behind you. This is not my house. Don't try to call the police."

There was a moment we all stood looking at him. Then I took the boy by one wrist and Nedra by the other and walked us, slowly, out the door. And the next day what hurt was my arm, where the boy suddenly ripped loose as we got about a half block away.

Nedra tells everybody how we left our coats behind and now we're going to have to get new ones and she's getting one with fur on the hood. She says, "We can't go back and ask *him* because he's a Sick Person."

"Oh, right," everybody says.

Nedra told her father. He scowled at me and screwed up his eyes. He said, "Are you sure that guy never touched Neddie."

"He was a perfect gentleman."

"Then there's this," he said, jabbing a finger at me. "I don't want to get clues my little girl is living on McDonald's hamburgers. Do you read me?" □

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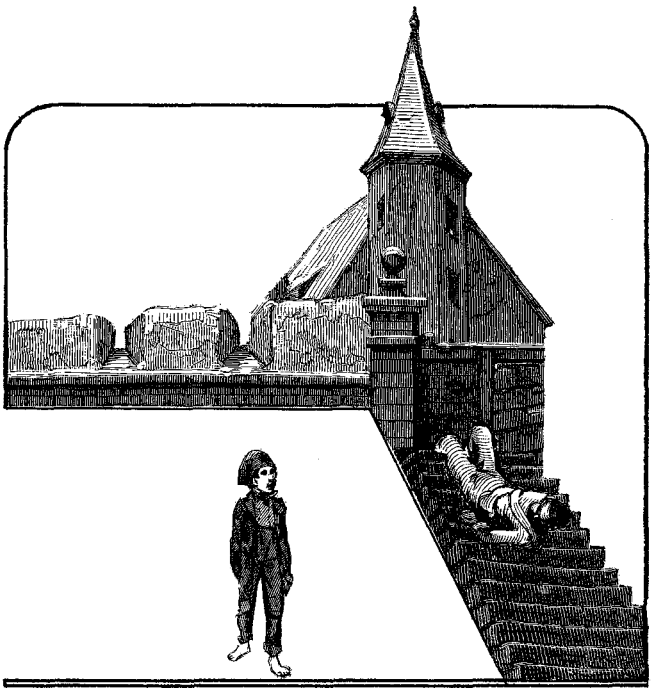
PAUL ZAKARAS came to the U.S. from Lithuania after World War Two. He teaches at the University of Texas.



But Someday You'll See

A STORY BY

PAUL

ZAKARAS

Uncle Jonas showed up the day after my seventh birthday wearing a bandage on the side of his shaved head. He gave me a Swiss pocketknife for a present, then rolled a thin cigarette and sat back to watch my struggle with the blades. I've made up my mind, he announced to my grandmother. I'm taking him with me tomorrow. The Germans are crawling home, the countryside's infested with Reds—a few more weeks and they'll be teaching us the secrets of the good life. He spat into the fire and pulled the knife from my fingers. Here, this one's for corks, he said. This one's a file. The little one opens cans. . . .

The morning was white and cold. I held on to uncle Jonas' back and listened to his soft grunts as he pedalled through the mist. We passed dark houses, crossed the blackened bridge where men with picks and shovels were already bent over their work, rode between flat empty fields and then followed the road into the forest. Silent forms of trees closed around us. The fog thickened, the air smelled of pine and mud and rotting leaves. I held uncle Jonas' back, gripping the rough cloth of his gray jacket, and shivered in the cold.

At midday we sat beside a black ditch eating rye bread and two of the tart shriveled apples grandmother had stuffed into my pockets. Uncle Jonas drew maps in the mud with a stick. There's Germany, he said, there's the sea, the Russians are back here someplace, and here's us. The dangerous part's crossing the frontier, right around here. If we're not careful— He smiled faintly as he watched my face. The teacher's son, he murmured. Just like his father.

The road narrowed. Deep mud sucked at our tires. We turned onto a mossy path and dragged the bicycle across a creek and up a slippery embankment. We walked along a railroad track, then got up on the bicycle again and rode down a bumpy trail that led into another road. The sun appeared briefly, rolling through the white shroud overhead. Crows cawed from hidden branches. At times we passed people walking—old men, mostly, stooped under loads of

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bristling firewood. Once, we heard loud voices behind us and quickly crossed into the brush to hide. No one came. The voices faded and disappeared. By evening, we had reached the outskirts of a tiny village where we waited for darkness to come before settling down in an abandoned barn.

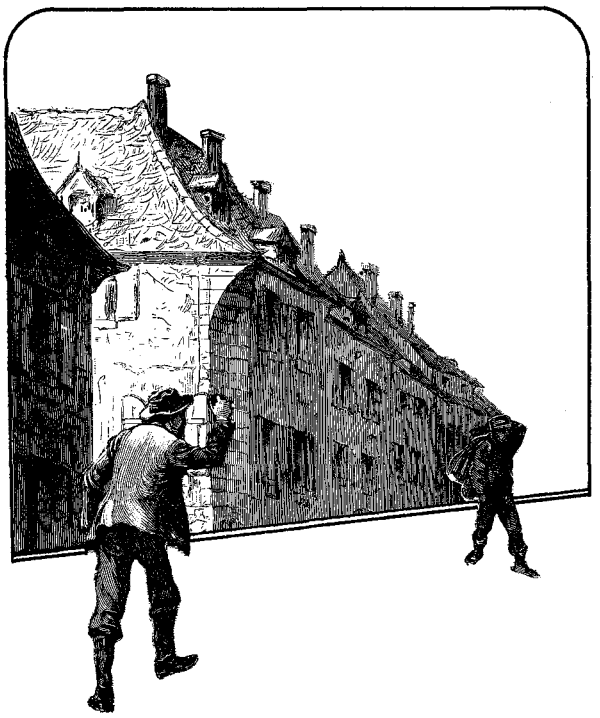
I heard laughter in my dreams and woke to see a man in a heavy overcoat sitting in the lamplight across from uncle Jonas. The man's nasal voice rose and fell above the steady rumble of my uncle's words. It seemed like too much trouble, in his opinion—too much bother. As he talked, the man took quick bites from a raw mushroom and shook his head. What you've got to remember, he said, is that there's nothing but old men and boys on the border now. He didn't see any reason for going farther south; his advice was to wade across the river at night. He knew just the place. Others had done it. When you reached the far side, all you had to do was— I caught only snatches of uncle Jonas' low reply. He had taken off his bandage and was wiping his temple with a rag he dipped and squeezed into the pail beside him. The lamplight enlarged his round head and made dark round hollows out of his deep-set eyes. The stranger listened to him, hunching forward, then finished off his mushroom with one bite and shrugged his shoulders. All right, all right, he said with a laugh. I'm convinced. Always thinking of the little details, aren't you? Okay. Good idea to bring the kid, too—

My uncle cut him off.

He's awake? Let's see. The stranger stood and walked over. You comfortable up here? Warm enough? Good, good. They call me Ritka, he said, and I'll be traveling with you. His face was only a shadow hovering in the dim light above me. He fumbled in his pockets and then closed his hand over mine. Here, he whispered, a little present. It's raspberry, my favorite flavor. But don't eat it now—save it—your stomach will tell you when.

A faltering dirty-white mare pulled us through the mud the next day. Uncle Jonas touched her flanks with his whip but she simply plodded on, oblivious. In the back of the cart, red-haired Ritka—a head taller and only half as wide as uncle Jonas—entertained me with stories of his exploits. He stood and twisted his legs into strange angles to show off the double-jointed knees that transformed him into an instant cripple and had kept him out of three different armies. He told me he was fluent in eight languages and that he had once worked as a spy. The Poles had accidentally captured him but he'd escaped their prison in the middle of winter and walked almost a hundred kilometers to safety. Wolves were after him in the snow, and bears. A girl helped him, an old woodcutter's youngest daughter. He winked at me and smiled mysteriously. She was a beautiful girl with golden hair that fell below her waist and she had risked a great deal for him. He owed his life to her, he said.

The road cut a straight line through dense forest, then wound along the bank of a shallow stream. We rounded a bend once and saw people camped in a clearing. There were two or three men and a large group of women and children. A fat red-faced woman with a green shawl was the center of everyone's attention, sobbing in a loud voice while others tried to console her. Gypsies, uncle Jonas said. Ritka sang a few lines of a song I'd never heard before and they both laughed. A woolly dog suddenly raced out into the road,



nipping at the mare's heels. Uncle Jonas flicked his whip and the dog slid and rolled through the mud, yelping. I looked back to see a small boy with dark eyes walk out to the dog. But the dog backed away from him, his half-tail tucked low, and limped off along the river.

Ritka showed me how to do tricks with my knife—how to throw it so that it would stick in the bottom of the cart, how to flip it into the air and catch it by the handle, how to hold it for self-defense. He asked what I wanted to be when I grew up and wondered if I'd ever thought of becoming a freedom fighter. He'd been a freedom fighter for a while, he said, back in the old days under the Czar. I was just a kid then—an orphan like you. My brothers took care of me and when they decided we'd been whipped and bullied long enough, they burned down the landlord's house and we ran off into the woods. You'll have to be a man now, they told me. A soldier. And that's what I became. We lived in the forest and set ambushes for the Czar's troops and when we were hungry I'd help my brothers steal food. We'd go into bakeries and they'd argue prices with the baker while I sneaked off with a fat loaf of bread under each arm. Sometimes they'd send me to a farmhouse to beg for meals. I'd limp up to the door with my crippled legs and shed tears and say that my parents had been killed and that I hadn't eaten in five days. Once in a while the people would take me in and let me stay the night. I'd wait until they were asleep and then I'd get up quietly and unlock the door or open a window and help my brothers carry away half the house. . . . That's how it is when times are hard. Ask your uncle Jonas, he knows. Got to use your head to stay alive. It's you or them and there's no way to be very nice about it.

In the afternoon, we stopped for a while to let the mare drink and graze. Ritka wandered off into the woods and came back with a scarf full of mushrooms. He showed me two with pinkish caps that were poisonous and washed the

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rest in the stream before handing them out. Mine were gritty and sent shivers down my back as I bit into them but when Ritka asked, I said they were delicious. Uncle Jonas rolled a pair of cigarettes and the two of them sat on stumps smoking and talking about Berlin and Hamburg and debating how far we'd have to go before we reached territory that the English and the Americans would conquer. You see, Ritka explained later, back in the cart, the war's going on all around the world. Hitler and Stalin are the men of the hour—they act and the rest merely react. And there's nobody who can stop them except for the English and the Americans. Us . . .? He shook his head. No, we're just a small country tucked away in a little corner and surrounded by giants who want to swallow us up. Why? He laughed. Because they want more land. Everybody wants more land—that's the way it is these days. Some claim the Russians want our ports, others say they want us just because the Germans want us. He shrugged and picked at something on the palm of his hand. It's complicated, I know, doesn't make much sense. But someday you'll see. Someday you'll open up a history book and it'll all be written down, right there on the pages.

Complicated. Uncle Jonas spat out the word with distaste and cracked his whip over the mare. There's only one thing, he said, only one thing he needs to know. And that's that they took his parents away one night. They got them out of bed and herded them into a cattle car and rode them off.

He turned the bandaged side of his head toward me. Four years ago it was, but he hasn't forgotten anything. Tell me, he said, can you remember where your mother hid you that night? He listened, then nodded. In the attic, in a pile of old clothes, he repeated softly. He knows, he remembers. . . .

The cart lurched on. A flock of starlings rose in front of us, only to settle back in the same spot after we had passed. A brown squirrel chattered angrily from a tree trunk and Ritka made a buck-toothed face at it and chattered back. When we stopped again, behind a thicket that hid us from the road, we could smell chimney smoke in the air. Dogs barked in the distance. The mare shuddered restlessly and watched us with her frightened eyes. We're here, uncle Jonas pointed, drawing more maps in the dirt. And we'll be crossing along here somewhere. He and Ritka had already agreed to get rid of the mare and cart and bicycle because they'd be useless for the cross-country night travel we'd be doing in Germany. Now they discussed the kind of trades Ritka could make in the village. Aren't we going with him? I asked. Not this time, uncle Jonas said. We'll stay here, out of sight. Ritka grinned and waved to me from his high seat on the cart, then yelled at the mare and drove off. At twilight, he came hiking back through the trees with a potato sack slung over his shoulder.

Food, he said. We can eat. But the news is bad. German patrols running around all over. If you're grabbed you don't get to answer a lot of questions. They kick you around for a while to let you know you're a slave and then they make you dig tank ditches until you drop. The peasants say go farther south, past Duba, and try there. He emptied his sack and spread the food in front of us: a hunk of bacon, two loaves of bread, a small cheese, several apples.

That's all? uncle Jonas asked.

All? Ritka tore off a piece of bread and tossed it over to me. What do you want here at the border? They almost ran me out of town at first, said they didn't have enough for themselves. All kinds of characters have been coming out of the woods armed with guns and knives and helping themselves to everything in sight. They're suspicious as hell down there. One of them—he had only one eye—wanted to know where I'd found the mare. He said it reminded him of one that belonged to a cousin back in such and such village. I told him I'd never heard of his lousy village. I said I came from the other direction and had a sick wife and three crying kids who'd starve to death if their father couldn't make a decent trade with his own people. One-eye kept insisting, kept raising his voice. Could I prove the mare was really mine? Could he prove it wasn't . . .? Ritka was letting the story carry him away now. He gestured with both hands and raised his voice in imitation of his one-eyed adversary. The picture he painted smelled of drama and growing danger: a scene of angry peasants with hidden pitchforks, of insinuating questions and sharp retorts, of a sudden change of tactics, of a humble man apologizing for the trouble he was causing, a generous man willing to show his good intentions by giving One-eye the mare—for free, a present. Take her to your cousin, I told him, and he'll have two strong horses to pull his wagon with. . . . That calmed them down, made them stop and think a little. Showed them the kind of man they were dealing with. Here Ritka laughed. So we shook hands, he said, and sat down and started talking business.

Uncle Jonas puffed on his cigarette and said nothing.

Rain fell that night. A cold drizzle that forced us to huddle around the roots of an enormous oak. I woke several times in the darkness, trying to get comfortable, and listened for the sounds of Ritka's breathing. In the morning I sat up to the rumble of distant thunder.

Artillery? Ritka asked.

Couldn't be. Not around here—not yet anyway. Uncle Jonas was standing and looking at the sky. The weather's cleared up. Somebody must be bombing.

For breakfast, uncle Jonas carefully passed around equal portions of bread and crumbly cheese. The cheese was salty

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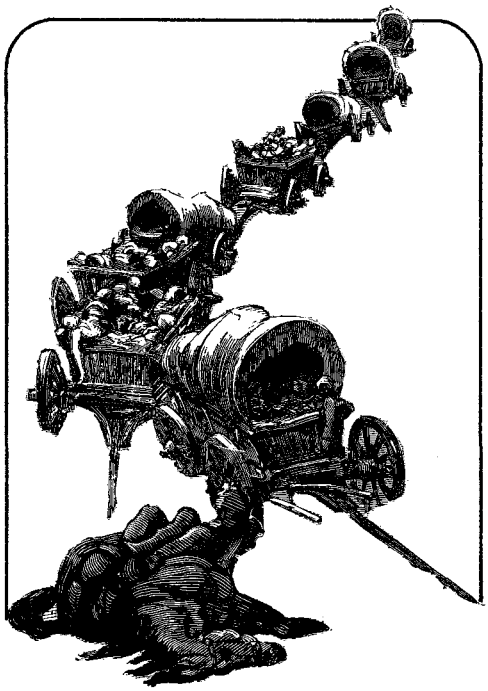

and made my mouth water. I swallowed it, drank from my canteen, then took Ritka's piece of candy from my pocket and rolled its sour sweetness on my tongue. Good? Ritka wanted to know. Hey, how are you feeling? Look at him, he's turning blue. And listen to those teeth. He took off his coat and sweater and wrapped the sweater around me, tying the sleeves around my waist. We can't have you getting sick, he said. What would we do without you?

We moved slowly that morning, stopping from time to time to let Ritka scout ahead. Bright shafts of sunlight slanted through the trees around us and when we finally left the woods and walked out onto a hilly orchard we saw country that was gold and brown and green. Small billowy clouds, intensely white in the sun, floated in a brilliant sky. Ritka strode off ahead and came back a few minutes later, shaking his head. It's safe to cross, he said, but no luck on food—somebody's beat us to all the pears. Looks like every tree in the place has been picked clean, every last branch.

We followed a winding path down into a valley and then walked single file along a warped fence that led to the top of a gentle rise. More orchards spread out in front of us. We're almost there, uncle Jonas panted. There's a small forest up ahead somewhere, ten kilometers at the most. We'll wait for dark and slip through tonight. Then we can start playing hide and seek with the Germans.

Ritka laughed. What Germans? Once we're past the border we'll see nothing but old men and boys and lonely *fräuleins*. He reached over and tousled my hair. We'll run circles around them, won't we? He wandered off down the hill in search of pears and still hadn't returned when we heard the distant drone of a plane. The sound seemed to hover somewhere off on our right for a while, then disappeared. A few moments later it was back, growing louder. Uncle Jonas shielded his eyes from the glare and searched the sky. Can you see it? Ritka shouted from the distance.

No, uncle Jonas answered. I think he's coming from the north, but— Wait, there he is.

I see it. Is he German?

I can't tell yet. Maybe Russian. He's dipping down for a look.

I could see Ritka now. He was walking up the hill in the bright sunshine, carrying his coat in one hand and shading his eyes with the other. The steady drone of the plane came closer and closer. Suddenly a harsh chopping staccato filled the air. What's he shooting at? Ritka yelled. Not us, we're not worth the ammunition.

Uncle Jonas pushed me down to the ground and dropped beside me. Get out of sight, he yelled.

I am, I am. Ritka's nasal voice trumpeted up the hill. But he's not shooting at us. That wouldn't—

He was drowned out by another, louder, staccato burst and by the crashing roar of the plane. It flashed by directly overhead, a dark form, then dropped out of sight beyond the hill and the tree tops before climbing toward the snowy clouds again. In a minute it was nothing more than a fly buzzing in the distance.

I got up to run but uncle Jonas' hand was gripping my shoulder, holding me back. Stay put, he said. I'll go down and see.

I followed a few steps behind him and watched him kneel on one knee. Ritka was stretched out beside his overcoat, lying on his back between two rows of knotted trees. There was a thick purplish welt on his unshaved neck. Blood dripped slowly from one ear. Uncle Jonas bent to listen for a heartbeat, then got to his feet.

Be nice to bury him, he said after a while. But with what? He picked up Ritka's coat and started going through the pockets. From one pocket he pulled a handful of onion rolls. From another, he emptied two sausages and a piece of ham wrapped in greasy newspaper and a small can of sardines. Well, well, he kept muttering. Well, well, well. . . . Here, he tossed me the coat. You'll need it. Then, almost as an afterthought, he looked down at Ritka and gave a slight shrug. He was always himself—you might say that. Always doing what he knew best . . . lying and cheating to the end.

We left Ritka between the trees and wandered from one hiding place to another, watching for soldiers who never came. Toward evening, uncle Jonas led the way into a clump of pines and dropped his cloth bag. Try to sleep, he said. We'll be crossing the border around midnight.

The sun went down. An icy half-moon rose over the trees. I lay on a bed of fragrant needles, wrapped in Ritka's coat, but I couldn't sleep. Dimly, in front of me, I could see uncle Jonas sitting against the trunk of a pine. He had taken off his boots, rearranged his bandage, and was now smoking a cigarette. He inhaled deeply, let the smoke out in long, almost soundless sighs and leaned forward once in a while to cough softly into his fist. The orange tip of his cigarette glowed like a firefly, then dimmed for long intervals, then glowed again.

I wanted to speak to him. Tell me, I wanted to ask, tell me how I'm like my father? In what ways?

But the words wouldn't leave my lips.

Later that night, he shook me awake. Time to move. His voice was hushed and urgent. Ten minutes, maybe fifteen, he said, and we'll be in Germany. □

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THE CONFESSION

Out of the blue he says he has shot an old man. It slips out of him unwillingly, as uncontrollable as warm sperm searching for a safe haven, not wanting to arrive at some half-way place. As if the twenty years he claims to have carried the bitter knowledge around secretly inside his head has merely served to enrage his brain, ravishing the cells. Excruciating pain. Now there is no choice.

"I killed an old man once. Shot him. His chest disappeared. He was just an ordinary old man. Maybe a Buddhist on his way to the temple. I dunno. Climbing up out of his village very early one morning with one of those funny stovepipe hats on. At least I guess he was a Buddhist. Just an old man out walking by his village."

Her hand still measures its arousal of him. Proud. Sensuous. It has commanded him all the way. He has wanted the command a whole lot more than the hand has needed to give it. But the hand needs to be needed. It stops caressing his thigh involuntarily. As in some child's game. She is unable to move it. The numbness won't let her play with his pubic hair, as she has intended.

The fresh summer night will not let the reality of his confession exist. It is unshatterable, strong. Like a plain woman who has spent a lifetime preparing for this moment. All dolled up with no place to go. But dolled up, by God, for once not a hair out of place. In that there is a resilient strength answerable only to nefarious gods.

"What do you mean you killed an old man once?"

She hears her disembodied voice asking it. It is calm and quiet. Like that of a priest in the confessional she has never had to face. He knows the sound from his childhood. A lapsed Catholic. Like most of the Irishmen she has known. The barrier between the man and herself is as familiar as the oncoming curb is to a blind person. The fact of familiarity tends to make her think the barrier knows her as intimately as a wailing wall knows tears. An intimacy that goes beyond knowledge, merely possessing. Direct. Total. Enveloping.

She does not want to know the answer. But she is not now allowed her innocence. She has let her young body agree that she is a vessel. And vessels are what people put things in. Like sperm. Like chicken soup. Like the blood on their hands they can no longer face. Like their nightmares.

The stuffy bar had had uncomfortable couches. Curved like kidneys. When they sat on them their knees crunched together. They were constantly aware of each other's skeletal self. She squirmed, always excusing herself. It was funny, her acting like that, as if this were their first meeting. He glowered at his shirt and wondered out loud why he had not worn cotton. Nylon didn't let the air through.

He was sweating more than she had ever seen him. She didn't like the color of his shirt and she didn't like to see a man sweat unless it was honest sweat. Her father's, after a hard day's work out in the warping sun. A good looking tennis teacher's, after a stinging set. The salty ooze sparkles, then, on tanned, ripply muscles, invitingly.

His sweat tonight was something else. She could not recognize it.

And the twitch. His left eyelid twitched barely perceptibly. They were talking about nothing much. It had been so long since they had seen one another. A lot to catch up on. And nothing at all. She smiled at the muscle spasm the way one smiles at someone else's naughty child. Amused. Slightly superior. Willing not to mention it. It was another of his evasions. He didn't like to commit himself. Ever.

He had been up to Moosehead Lake with five of the guys. Four days and it had rained all the time. Got down to the low 40s at night. The fourth of July, by God. They'd

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hired two planes, a Cessna and something else, and flew into the wilderness. Strapped the three canoes to the pontoons of the planes. The fog was so thick when they took off that only two of them were delivered to the campsite the first night. The pilot returned and refused to go back until the morning. When they did take off the visibility was still practically zero and they flew damned close to the tree tops all the way. When they all got together again they waded up through the water and the thick, overhanging trees. In the rain. They'd caught big brook trout. They used worms. They boozed and sat inside the ten-foot tent most of the rest of the time. It never stopped raining. Cold, clammy rain. They had stood around the roaring fire. They got canned and talked about broads.

Whenever he was with Joe and the boys he called women broads. She hated that in him.

There were ice chunks in the lake.

That was pretty much the extent of their talk in the bar. Except for the stale air and his sweating they could have continued. Or she could have told him she wanted to go home early. It would have been just the same. No fuss. Their passion had homogenized. It was friendly, accessible to accommodations of mood, spirit. And there hadn't been too many drinks as in the past. It was she who had controlled that, too, not wanting to get to the peak of their excitement the same old way. Not really knowing if there was another. The more he talked about their past excesses, which he did shortly after finishing his story of the lake, the more she confiscated the reminiscences. She consciously tried them on sexually in her mind, fantasizing for any old tickle. Another drink might have helped, but she refused.

Then he told her about a girl who had propositioned him. It was the night before he left for Moosehead. He figured he needed it, what with four nights ahead with the boys. When he told her, it was as if they had agreed she would be the vessel. The decision was simple, unconscious. Yes, of course I'd like a piece of pie. Apple, please.

He would take her for a ride in this nice Old Maid night. They would go back to his apartment. He would seduce her.

The announcement of seduction amuses her. The incongruity is the trigger. Seduction is the absence of verbalization. One might as well agree to death. Agreement negates the possibility. Turns it topsy-turvy. Puts it in a child's world instead of the territory of adults where it belongs. Yes, you will seduce me. But because I will it. How does one get there from here? She feels the whole process is like stuffing too many chicken feathers into a pillow tick. They won't all go.

They make love, instead. Easily, simply, stirring no grand passions at first. It's when her hand takes over his body, commanding it, that things break loose. His confession oozes to the tip of his tongue, lurks just behind his pearly Irish teeth, waiting.

Afterwards he brings her a warm, wet towel. He washes her ritualistically. He purifies her for his message.

"You've never disappointed me in bed," she murmurs. She feels loving.

If she had not said it he might have held back his confession.

A Story by Kay Cassill

"I have tonight," he says. He is the failed Catholic. Guilty for all us sinners. She is not.

"I never told anyone before. The other night I told the guys, sitting in that goddamned tent at the lake in the rain and cold. Getting smashed. Now, I've told you. I don't know what made me do it. That bastard's been in my dreams for twenty years. He's not there now. We were sitting jawing at one another and I just blurted it out. But I didn't tell it to them like I'm telling you now. I cried, for Christsake. Oh, I didn't blubber or anything. But my eyes were wet."

KAY CASSILL has recently come back to Rhode Island from Europe, where she worked on stories and articles—among the latter, an illustrated essay about North Sea oil wells.

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He speaks as if to his mother. The woman with one leg she has never met but in whose house she has carnally known the son.

"What did Joe and the others say when you told them?" She says it sing-song. She doesn't know where the calm questions are coming from. She still feels nothing. It is because of the Old Maid night.

"They talked around it. As if they were embarrassed for me." He turns his head away. The next words come muffled from the pillow. "They must think I'm a crazy."

She strokes his hair. He has let it grow longer since the first time they met. She calculates how old he must have been when he shot the old man. She starts to let him off the hook only a mother would. But it won't come out.

"You care a lot about what they think. More than anything else. Don't you?"

"Yeah. I care what they think."

How can I help you? she wonders. She doesn't say it.

"How did you feel when you did it?"

"Like I wanted to pull the bullet back into the gun as soon as I saw him crumple. I blew his chest out. Just an old man out walking by his village."

When they'd first walked into the room and before they'd made love, he'd turned on the television. Not the sound. Just the picture. For the light. He likes to watch what they do to each other. The pointillist effect pickles the room. A weird glow appears. Their flesh takes on a grotesque mottle. She watches the screen—the moving lips, the bulging eyes, the glitter of glasses—moot visitors in the corner.

"You know, that's why I can't really condemn this Calley completely. Of course, Calley shot women and little children. And, for all I know that old man may have had a hand grenade on him . . . or something . . . oh, Christ . . . of course I know he didn't have . . . a grenade on him . . . he was just a little old man . . . a villager."

"Wars are like that." She wants to vomit for saying it. "I mean, they make people do what they wouldn't do otherwise. It's the pressure."

"The day before, an American Sabre jet came over and killed a whole squad of my guys. I just got mad, I guess."

Suddenly she remembers a friend of his telling her confidentially once what a wonderful guy he was. How brave he had been during the war. How he never liked to talk about it. She can't remember the details of his heroism but she can see the friend's face telling her. Sincere. Honest.

"Where did it happen?"

His hesitation makes her shiver. Now she feels it all. It is sudden, like a bullet in the heart. Placing it with a name will make it real. He won't ever be able to deny it again.

"South of Seoul."

"Where?"

"Tu-ahn," he drawls, contemptuously. "Something like that."

She asks for her drink and cigarettes. They are in the other room. "We'll share," she says.

"Yeah, share."

The tape deck is giving off old-time Sinatra crap and he fiddles with it, then listens intently at the terrace doors. Someone is being rowdy in the parking lot. There's been a lot of gas siphoning. Tires and batteries stolen. He caught one just in time a few weeks back. The guy was heading for his new car. The bastard had taken off through the woods but made the mistake of stopping at the all-night milk store on the highway. Cops got him.

He shows her color photographs of his trip to Moosehead. He looks drunk. The pictures are already in plastic in an album. The cover is stained, an ugly blotch of brown. There are some shots of his cabin in Maine. Paid twenty-eight hundred dollars for it. Fixed it up himself. In the last picture he is squatting over a dead animal. He looks grim.

"That's the one who was eating my cabin. Big holes in it. We painted the cabin red to try to keep him out. Before it was just unpainted shingle."

"What is it?"

"Porcupine."

"Did you get him?"

"Joe did. I don't like shooting *any* animals."

She didn't ask him why he went up there hunting then. She didn't have to. His voice cracked. "Hey, can we take a ride? I'd like to get out for awhile."

They take the back roads. It is leisurely. The Old Maid is going to stick it out until the last dog is hung.

They pass an old farm house. Someone has set fire to it. It was probably abandoned, she says, because the police are there and some fire trucks but no one seems disturbed. The kids in the neighborhood are all standing around in pajamas and shorts and tee shirts, their arms folded. They watch.

He tells her about his friend who has just returned from Bali and Singapore and Japan. Saved up his dough all year. Takes long vacations to new places. Says he could do that, too, if he just spent a little less on booze and gas. The friend assures him that when he gets someplace new it's a whole other world opening up. He's tempted. She wants to know if he'll be changing jobs and apartments again soon. It's about time. He says he will. He wants to make a clean sweep again. Not see any of the people he's been seeing. Not go to any of the places he's used to around town. A clean slate. She says yes, she thought so. He doesn't see the two lesbians he used to know in the other apartment house. And the girl who introduced him to the witches' coven is too spaced out. His roommate's girl has been eyeing him and his roommate is a very jealous guy. A sickie, a real sickie. She says it could be dangerous if he had an affair with her. She mentions the couple who were shot the day before in broad daylight. A shotgun close up. While their two small kids watched from the back seat of the car. The guy claimed the woman spurned his advances or something. He said he wasn't afraid. Unless, of course, his roommate had a knife or gun or something. She says yes, that's what she meant.

Driving herself home in her own car she doesn't use her seat belt. She doesn't exactly know why, except there are very few cars on the road. Suddenly she is singing an old hymn. From out of nowhere, a stupid hymn. Ridiculous. She laughs at herself. She thinks ruefully of the early nights after being with him . . . exhilarating, lightheaded, satiating.

She forces herself to recall the Sinatra crap from the tapes. She lights another cigarette. She hums vigorously when she doesn't remember the words to the crap. If she hums loud enough she won't be able to hear his talk about the old man dead. □

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WINTERSWIJK

CHESTER AARON

Over Amsterdam. Descending toward Schiphol.

The El Al stewardess bestowed an approving smile as he locked and tightened his seat belt.

In 1945 Ben had only seen Holland from the ground. He'd not known Nikki then. How old had she been? She was 35 now—no, 36. That meant she'd been seven.

The official leafed through his passport. "How long do you stay in the Netherlands?"

Before Ben's response—"Two weeks."—was completed the official stamped his passport, slid it across the counter, waved him through the gate, and reached for the passport of Avrum Huss (a meteorology professor at Hebrew University, Ben had learned on the plane, with an apartment in Jerusalem).

While he waited at the luggage belts Ben tried to find Nikki in the crowd behind the glass wall. He'd still not found her when the luggage began arriving.

It was possible, he knew, that he was being deceived by her image of two years ago, when he'd met her in San Francisco. *He'd* changed in those two years, surely she had. "Oh," she'd said, in San Francisco, after they'd been together a month, "I wish I'd seen you before you began losing your hair. All those curls." As he searched now for his two suitcases his hand wandered to the top of his head to brush the remnant curls (even fewer than there had been two years ago in San Francisco).

She must have pushed to the front of the crowd at that moment because there, suddenly, she was. Waving her arms. Her hair longer than he remembered it. But even from this distance there was no mistaking those wide, almost Slavic cheeks, that strong-toothed smile. She was wearing the white denim slacks and jacket she'd worn in the photograph she'd sent him last month. He waved back, working to restrain the alternating waves of anticipation and apprehension.

Carrying the two bags he started toward the exit. Nikki, her arms open wide, waited. "Benjamin!" They embraced, leaned back to study each other's faces, laughed, fell again into each other's arms.

While Nikki maneuvered her white Fiat out of the parking lot, into and out of the traffic surrounding Schiphol, and then onto the freeway, they spoke very little. But they kept smiling at each other and groping for each other's hands.

Utrecht . . . Hague . . . Austerlitz . . . Nijmegen . . .

"What are you saying"? She leaned toward him.

"Pardon?"

"You were speaking. I couldn't quite hear. *Ach,* you must be exhausted."

He must have been reading the signs aloud. "I fought at Nijmegen."

"Ah," she said. "Yes, the war."

That first night in San Francisco he'd admitted his surprise at the absence of an accent in her English. She'd laughed. Had he, she'd asked, also expected her to be wearing wooden shoes and a little lace cap?

He had noticed a very slight accent now. Was it the accent that suggested her reserve, her coolness? Or did she resent his having reminded her of the war? Searching for a clue in her face he ended up admiring her profile. A child, she'd been a child, not quite eight, when the tank he was riding had smashed open the gates at Dachau.

They reached Apeldoorn at ten minutes past noon. The shops were closed. Nikki drove slowly, grinning as he stared and sighed. "Five minutes," she said, as they reached the edge of town, "and we'll be home." She sounded as if the town, the home, were already as much his as they were her own.

They parked in the driveway. Nikki, holding his hand, insisted they tour the garden before going inside. In front of the house, as well as at the rear, weeds and grasses and

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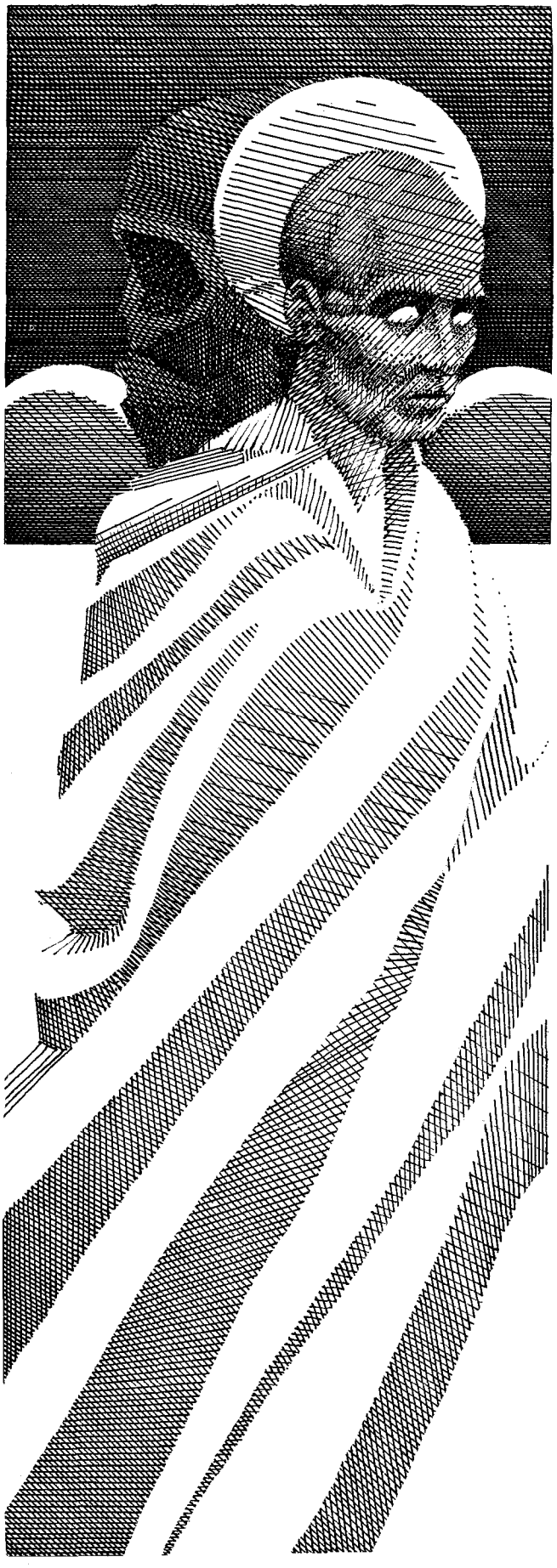

shrubs and flowers grew in flamboyant disorder. On either side of nearby houses, and along the sides of the houses on the opposite side of the dirt lane, the tight green lawns were bordered with pathways and flowers so trim, so precisely arranged in shape and color, they might have been selected by computer.

What about her neighbors? Ben asked. Weren't they unhappy?

Nikki giggled. Her neighbors, very religious, were certain that anyone who chose to live in such disorder must have a soul to match. She simply believed, she said, that weeds and grasses and shrubs, like people, should be permitted to grow in freedom. She giggled again. Her having a male house-guest for two weeks would prove to her neighbors their faith was pure. She gave a slight shrug of disdain and, still holding his hand, she led him inside.

The house was as solid and comfortable as a Swiss chalet, with a sunny loft at the top of the spiral stairway. Through one of the large windows Nikki indicated the location of Arnhem, beyond the fields and the horizon. They'd be going there tomorrow or the next day.

Strutting, chattering as she exhibited the rest of the house, Nikki did not even try to conceal her pride. That pride, Ben knew, had not come easily.

When she'd been in California she'd described the apartment she was then living in, in Utrecht. She'd lived there the seven years she and her husband had been married and the three since their divorce. "When I go back," she'd said, "I leave that apartment. I move away from Utrecht."

Nikki opened the door of the smaller of the two downstairs bedrooms. "Your room," she said, with a dramatic flourish of her hand.

"*My* room?"

"You might," she added hastily, "sleep here alone. Or we might sleep together." Her voice grew more personal. "However it happens, Benjamin, you should have your own room."

He followed her into the kitchen. At the back door, gazing out at the wild yard, he heard Nikki behind him, at the sink, filling a teapot with water. Her coolness in the car, and now her attempts to prepare him for abstinence—something was wrong. For a moment he had a terrifying suspicion that he should have gone directly from Tel Aviv to California.

In the hemp-carpeted living room, Nikki poured his tea. "Benjamin," she said, "neither of us knows what will happen. You'll be here in Holland for two weeks. Then what? Will you stay in Holland? No. You could not make a living here. You would miss your children. Will I come to live in America? No. Holland is my home, my country."

He felt as vulnerable as one of her patients. He'd not be surprised to learn that she had his case history filed in her desk.

Why was she pessimistic now, *after* he'd arrived? If she'd had doubts about this trial, why had she agreed to go through with it?

"And there is always Piet," she said.

Ah yes. There was, is, always Piet.

"He does not want to marry me," she said. "But even should things work out for us, if you managed to stay, even if you and I decide to get married—well, I'd want to continue my relationship with Piet."

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"You mean if we were married and lived here in Holland you'd still want to spend an occasional evening with Piet, or maybe a weekend, or a week or two."

"That is a threat to you?"

"Oh no. Not at all. I think it's very generous for you to sleep with your old friends after we're married. Can you give me a rough count of the number of men I'd have to compete with?"

"Compete with? Why torture yourself, Benjamin? Piet is not a threat to you. If we were to work things out, Benjamin, if you were to live here and we were married, you would be very special in my life. Neither Piet nor any other man would be a threat to our marriage."

Tired, depressed, he was tempted to call a taxi—were there taxis in Apeldoorn?—and go to Amsterdam, find a hotel room, take a plane tomorrow to California.

"I am stupid, Benjamin. We should not talk such serious subjects so soon. You must be tired. Why don't you shower? Sleep. *Ach*, I am stupid, stupid. After, we'll have a quiet supper and we'll talk. Agreed?"

Agreed.

It was dark when he opened his eyes. Nikki was sitting on the end of his bed, her book tilted to catch the light from the hallway lamp. She was wearing the short yellow terrycloth robe she'd worn in San Francisco. A mix of light from the lamps in the living room and the hallway softened the angles and shadows of her face.

Nikki, as they lay together in the darkness, whispered, "Benjamin, Benjamin."

"I forgot how you liked my name."

"I love it. All these months I say it often to myself. It is so much an Old Testament name. So Hebrew. Ben-ja-min. Behn - jah -meeen."

They lazed about the house the first day. The second day they drove to Arnhem, then to the Kröller-Muller museum. Nikki took her bike out of the garage the third day and they rented a second bike in town. They spent the day exploring the country roads. When they returned, late in the afternoon, Nikki insisted he nap while she prepared supper.

After supper Nikki stacked the dishes in the kitchen sink, sat Benjamin in a large wing chair, pulled an oversize leather beanbag up close, and from there filled their glasses with cognac.

"Benjamin," she said, "what was it like, Israel? And the Israelis? Are you happy you went, Benjamin?"

She pronounced it as the El Al stewardess had pronounced it, as he'd promised himself he would pronounce it from now on: *Is-rye-ay-leez*. Four syllables instead of the Americanized three.

What was it like, Israel? Was he happy he'd gone?

He'd been in Israel six weeks, he'd been here in Holland three days, and the memories of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Beersheba, of the temple of Solomon, the Mount of Olives, had already begun to fade. The calm order of the Dutch countryside, the angelic blond blue-eyed children, the assurance and stolid comfort on the Dutch faces, had already diluted the memories of his experiences in Israel.

Until the hour he'd left Tel Aviv, until the very moment the plane had banked and glided out over the Mediterranean, until that moment he'd not been aware of the impact the country had made upon him.

The plane had been delayed for almost 2 hours at Lod Airport. While he waited—tired, hot, perspiring, still irritated by the brusque search of his clothes and his body and his luggage—he promised himself that he would never return to the country. It was, he'd decided, as alien to him as Outer Mongolia or Ethiopia. But on looking back at the city, at the land, he felt a pain in his chest. He wanted to weep, to rush forward and beg to be taken back. He thought at first the pain had come from the rapid altitude change, but no. No, no, that was not it. He recognized the pain. It was the very same pain that had clutched his heart that spring day he'd left his home to enlist in the army. When he glanced back, hoping for one last view of Jerusalem, he saw his adolescent self stepping off the porch of that gray wooden house in Sundown, Pennsylvania. He saw himself climbing the asphalt road and, from the top of the hill, looking back to see his mother weeping on her fists and his father, as erect as the stocky body would permit, clutching at the scarred porchpost for support.

"Ben? Benjamin?"

In that quiet Apeldoorn room Ben's face must have betrayed his anguished efforts to translate those memories into words. He stammered and shook his head, trying to clear his eyes.

Nikki put down her cognac and came to the chair in which he was sitting. She wiped her eyes, but one fugitive tear remained on her cheek. She laid her head in his lap. "Benjamin, Behn - jah - meeen."

Friday, when Nikki returned from the clinic, they drove to Amsterdam. She'd reserved a room at the Red Lion, on the Damrak, for Friday and Saturday nights.

They walked through the city Friday evening, stopping for coffee at sidewalk cafes. Late, after dark, they went to a restaurant. "The best in Holland," Nikki said. She added, casually, "Piet introduced me here. He's a real gourmet."

At the beginning of the meal, when the waiter had offered the wine list, Ben had suggested that Nikki ask for a carafe of house wine. Piet, he knew, would have studied the list, selected a special label, a vintage year, would have tasted the wine and then would have probably sent it back.

Later, at the Red Lion cafe, as they had coffee, they observed the manners of a French family at one table, an English family at another, a Turkish family at a third.

"Tomorrow," Ben said, "I want to go to the Anne Frank house. Would you go with me?"

She started to shake her head, as if she intended to refuse, but then she nodded.

They paid three guilders each, and behind a long line of other silent visitors, climbed the narrow, almost vertical stairway. The walls of a large room at the top of the stairs, and several long tables, were covered with texts and photographs describing the rise of Nazism in Germany and the occupation of Holland. Nikki would have hurried past the photographs and out of the room had Ben not caught her and held her back. Once, her face pale, she paused to read a column from a 1941 Dutch newspaper urging cooperation with the German occupation troops. At a photograph of three women, their heads bald,

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their faces battered, Nikki said, "I was nine years old. I remember I watched two women, neighbors, kicked and punched. Collaborators. Like these women, their heads were shaved. I was sick."

Nikki led Ben toward the door, but she stopped at a display case. Her hand caught his arm. On the card at the bottom of the leaflet under the glass, printed in Dutch, English, German, French, and Spanish, were the words *Dutch Resistance Movement Leaflet*.

PROTEST AGAINST THE DETESTABLE PERSECUTION OF JEWS!!!
ORGANIZE SELF-DEFENSE IN THE FACTORIES AND DISTRICTS!!!
SOLIDARITY WITH THE HARD-HIT JEWISH SECTION OF THE WORKING PEOPLE!!!
SNATCH THE JEWISH CHILDREN FROM NAZI VIOLENCE—TAKE THEM INTO YOUR FAMILY!!!
STRIKE!!! STRIKE!!! STRIKE!!!
SOLIDARITY!!! COURAGE!!!
FIGHT PROUDLY FOR THE LIBERATION OF OUR COUNTRY!!!

Nikki pulled him through the door. Into the room that had been occupied by Anne and Albert Dussel. The room had been too small for Anne alone, and certainly too small for Anne and Dussel, but now it contained about thirty women, men, and children from all over the world.

He took his turn at the window. Two stories down: yards, fences, a cat clawing a tree trunk. The cat leaped to the top of the fence. How Anne would have loved to see, just once, that cat stretching across the top of that fence in the afternoon sun of such a balmy September day. But when Anne lived here the curtains and shutters had never been opened.

Nikki stood beside him, her hand fumbling for his. "Do you remember," she whispered, barely able to talk, "do you remember the line from her diary? *Sometimes I feel as transparent as a branch in April*."

Tears running down her cheeks fell from her chin onto her thin yellow blouse. Her lips quivered and she struggled to get the words free. "Let's . . . let's get out of . . . this Goddamn place."

He wanted to stay but he followed her.

They did not talk as they walked along the canals, they did not hold hands. Now and then he glanced at her face and saw Piet kissing those lips, caressing those wide cheeks, sleeping with her. He tried to be civilized. Shouldn't he be willing to share Nikki? Wasn't half of the love Nikki would offer him more than he could expect from any other woman who would offer him all her love? She wasn't a Jew but she sympathized. That was all that mattered, wasn't it? *Wasn't* it?

At the Red Lion cafe, while he was counting out the guilders for the patient waiter, Nikki, who'd started into the lobby, returned. She picked her way past the crowded tables, grabbed the lapels of his jacket and kissed him hard on the mouth. The waiter, with a conspiratorial grin, selected the proper change from the palm of Ben's hand and then turned quickly to the next customer.

Nikki said something in Dutch and promptly translated. "I said I love you. Will you remember that? No matter what happens, will you remember that?" She spoke as if they were alone in their bedroom.

Ben hugged her, lifting her from the floor. She squealed. A group of students huddled at a nearby table shouted in Dutch and then cheered.

Four days before he was to leave for California Nikki announced that she wanted him to meet her parents. He wondered if marriage, on his terms, had become more appealing to her, more possible. For him the idea of meeting the parents of his fiancé was just old fashioned enough, continental enough, to be charming. He decided not to ask why she'd changed her mind, or even if she had changed.

Nikki waited until she moved the Fiat past a large truck filled with squealing pigs, then she reached over to pat his thigh. She let her hand lie there. "I've told them about you." For just a moment a pain chewed at his stomach as he thought about their separation in three days.

Three days. And nothing had been settled. He'd be returning to California alone, as he'd come.

"What did you tell them? That their daughter's in love with a Jew?"

Her hand slid from his and came up to stroke his nose. "Such an elegant nose," she said.

"What did you tell them about me?"

"That you're 15 years older than I am, that you're a professor, that you are in love with me, that I am in love with you." She laughed and leaned toward him and almost ran the Fiat into a Mercedes that had no tail lights.

He decided not to ask again if she'd told them he was a Jew. "Tell me about them, Nikki."

She settled back. "They live in Winterswijk, maybe four miles from the German border. My father's a carpenter. My mother's a . . . what? . . . a devoted wife. In San Francisco you would call her straight. She is very unhappy about my sleeping with two men."

"So is one of the two men."

She slapped his knee, feigning irritation. "Sleeping with one, not married to him, is bad enough. But two men, no. My father is a gentle person, never upset. Finds good in everyone. My mother will feed you every 10 minutes. You sent me *Portnoy's Complaint*. Remember? She is a Dutch Sophie Portnoy."

"There is no such thing. What happened to them during the war?"

"My father was taken. He worked in the Saar, in mines

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and factories. A friend in Utrecht, an official, Dutch, had friends in the German army. Through our friend my father, after two years, came home. He was lucky. The others, none survived."

Oh yes, he'd been lucky all right. There were six million who'd not been so lucky, who'd had no friends in the German army.

"Do you remember the Germans, Nikki? You were so young."

"I remember."

They arrived in Winterswijk near midnight. Nikki had said that her parents never stayed up past 10 o'clock but both were awake and waiting. Though they spoke fair English, they and Nikki spoke to one another mostly in Dutch. With Ben, there was talk about the relative merits of Dutch and American football, Dutch and American food, Ben's thoughts about Holland. And Israel? Had he enjoyed Israel? Again it was *Is-rye-el*. Would there be another war? Would it last more than six days as the last one had? Less maybe? Did he know there had been Jews in Holland since the 15th century? After they fled Spain, during the Inquisition, Holland took them in. There was a famous ancient synagogue in Amsterdam. Had he seen it? No, but maybe he would before he left.

At breakfast—a variety of cheeses and cold meats and jams, and a selection of dense and tasty breads—Nikki's father suggested that she might take Ben to the open-air market in town. "The best herring in Holland," he said.

Nikki shook her head and said something serious, almost angry, in Dutch.

"Come on," Ben said. He explained to Nikki's parents that he'd become addicted to those onion-coated herring fillets that slid into the mouth and down the throat like liquid velvet.

"It's crowded," Nikki said. "Even the Dutch don't go." As if she regretted saying it, or as if she regretted denying him the herring, she said O.K., they would go. She spoke to her parents in Dutch. For just a moment she seemed troubled. Then she smiled at Ben. "Come. We walk. We need the exercise."

The streets leading into the square were packed with slowly moving cars.

"My God," Ben said. "All the cars are German."

"I thought you might not be happy."

"Where the hell do they all come from?"

"From Germany."

He glanced at her. Was she trying to be witty?

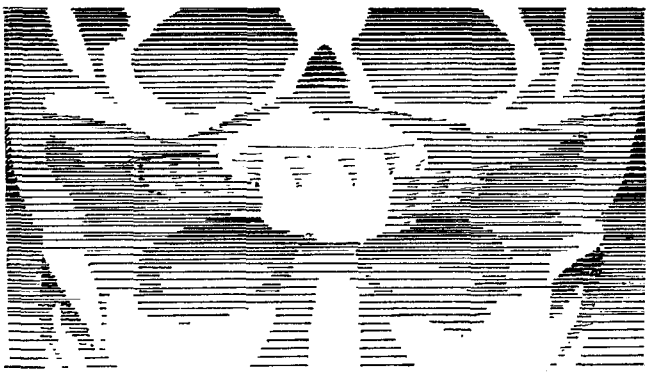
"The border is close," she said. "Germans come for low prices. I have not come three years now. It is worse than before. Would you like to go back?"

"Not yet."

Holding hands, they picked their way through the crowd that was propelled forward, it seemed to Ben, by the energy of guttural German voices. Filling the sidewalks, spilling into the streets, fathers and mothers his own age strolled with almost dignified arrogance. He could not distinguish a single Dutch voice. Could there be Dutch citizens daring to speak their own language behind their closed shutters? Why did they surrender their town so meekly every Saturday morning? Hadn't they realized yet that it was the Germans who'd lost the war 28 years ago?

Blond and blue-eyed, stuffed like freshly packed bratwurst into *lederhosen*, shorts, cotton dresses, sandals, the Germans sucked in and expelled the humid heat. Like flowing molasses they filled the sidewalks, the streets, the market stalls.

Holding Nikki's hand, Ben was aware not just of being stared at but of being stared at with contempt, often with anger, and, from a few faces, with hatred. He noticed a man in his late forties, his left sleeve empty of its arm. Wide suspenders restrained most of his transparent blue nylon shirt and wet undershirt but threatened to yield under the pressure of his pendulous paunch. His heavy sandals matched the sandals of four teen-aged boys walking, not walking but marching, in front of him. The man, whispering, prodded his wife with his right elbow, pointed with his remaining index finger. Both of the muscular arms of his wife were filled with a pair of sleeping babies, probably children (skyblue eyes under those closed lids?) of the



young couple behind her, to whom she now spoke. The couple, laughing, grew sober as they too inspected Nikki and Ben. Especially Ben.

His face grew warm and he turned away so Nikki might not notice his anger, but that need—not to be noticed in his anger—compounded the anger, intensified it. "I don't like this," he said.

"Ignore them," Nikki said.

How could he ignore them? He might as well try to ignore *her*. And rather than ignore her he wanted now to exaggerate his attention. He wanted, needed, to demonstrate his love. Not *his* love, but *her* love, her love for him. He wanted these blond Kraut bastards to watch this blond blue-eyed *Mädchen* being fucked right there on the sidewalk. He wanted them to scream out that no blond blue-eyed Aryan had ever fucked her so beautifully, so thoroughly, as had this hooknosed Jew.

He hugged Nikki closer, exaggerating his joy. He laughed with as provocative a vulgarity as he could manage. He thought of the blacks in Berkeley and San Francisco, on the campus of the college, parading their white chicks. He'd never felt such affinity with those blacks. If he could have carried it off, he would have attempted that swagger raised to high art by those blacks who, in this Dutch street, would have sneered at those

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two teen-aged toughs lounging in that doorway. The ultimate honkies.

You honkey bastards. You honkey Nazi bastards.

Nikki gasped. "My God, Benjamin. What are you saying?"

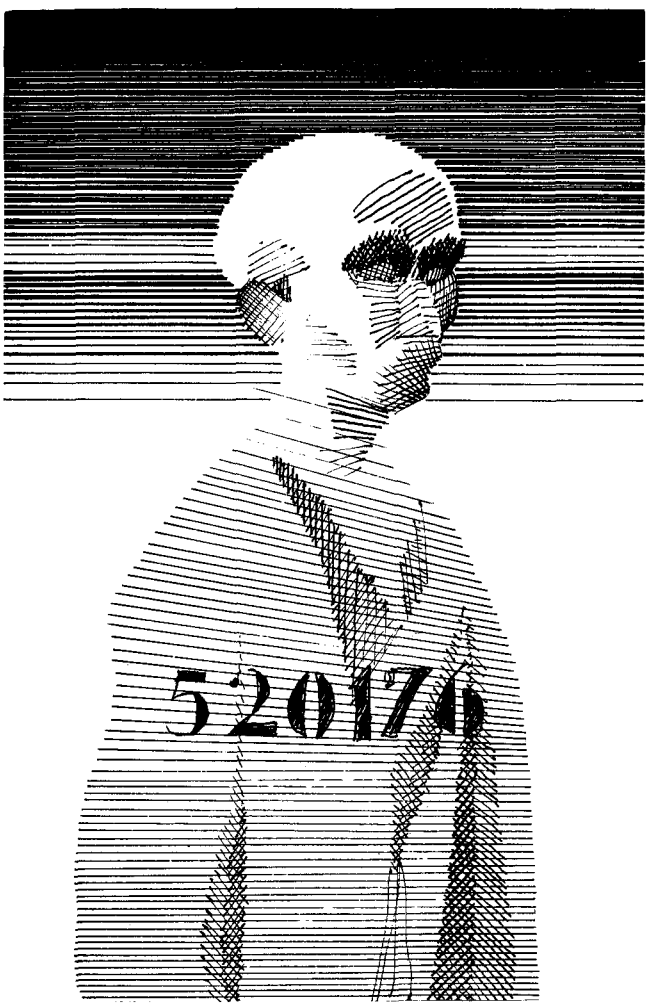
What was *she* saying? Had she read his thoughts?

If only those Israeli soldiers from the Sinai were standing beside him now. What he wouldn't give to lead a platoon of those tough fearless Jews, their Uzzi machine guns slung over their shoulders, *yarmulkas* topping their curly black hair. What he wouldn't give to lead those Jew warriors down this street to confront those two SS troopers standing there spead-legged and arrogant in that doorway, their spiked blond hair erect as needles.

"SS?" Nikki asked. "Benjamin, are you sick? What do you mean—SS? My God, what are you trying to do?"

He refused the grasp of Nikki's hand as the two teen-agers, joined by three more, pointed at him and shouted in derisive German. *Jude!* Like a spark sprung free of its fire that word leaped clear of the voices. *Jude!* The aroma in the marketplace came not from the herring but from charred flesh as his tank advanced on the gates of Dachau. The boxcars and flatcars strung along the railroad spur were packed solid, piled high, with stiff emaciated human logs. Disturbed by the rumbling tanks, an occasional log fell from the piles to lie at the side of the rails.

Ben leaped from the tank, not to the ground but to the floor of Anne Frank's room. Through the window he saw the cat



Anne had never seen stretching along the top of the sun-washed fence. At the bottom of the narrow vertical stairway leading to the muddy Sherman tank lay the upper torso, the upper half of a torso, that had once been a young woman. Anne Frank? The tank rumbled forward over the torso. Out of its cross-sectioned end, like toothpaste stripped from its tube, squirted the life of Anne Frank.

He heard voices of men and women, all of them Dutch.

"Please lie still, Benjamin," Nikki pleaded.

He tried to turn his head, to locate her face within the cloud that seemed to be shifting before his syes, but something kept his head fixed in place.

"Benjamin," Nikki said, "you're in a hospital. There are cuts on your face. The doctor is sewing them."

Cuts? Sewing his face? Ah—those young SS following him, jeering him, challenging him, attacking him.

"Is it bad?"

"The doctor says in a few days you will look better."

"It's hard to breathe."

Nikki spoke in Dutch. A man replied, in Dutch.

"Your nose is broken," Nikki said. "It will be easier in a few days to breathe."

A man spoke again. And then a woman, not Nikki.

"They ask why you did it, Benjamin."

Why *he* did it?

"A madman," Nikki said. "You were like a madman, Benjamin. You ran at them screaming like a madman. Even the ones who helped you, who saved you, you kicked them."

She was holding and squeezing his hand but that did not soothe the pain the accusation injected. She—*she* who lived eight and ten hours every day with madmen—she was calling *him* mad. Hopeless.

Ben let himself sink inside the white cloud.

Nikki stopped the Fiat at the curb in front of the Red Lion. "If you change your mind, Benjamin, call me. I'll drive in from the clinic."

"We better say goodbye here." When he reached in to kiss her, tears bubbled up in her eyes.

"So this is how it ends?" she said.

"Yes, I guess so, Nikki. I can't take Piet. . . ."

"It is not Piet that angers you. You know what it is. Say it. Say the words. I won't say them for you. Say those words, Goddamn you. Tell the truth. Tell me the truth. Tell yourself the truth, God*damn* you, Benjamin."

He lifted the two suitcases out of the back seat. "I can't share my wife with other men," he said.

Strange kitten sounds grew inside Nikki's throat as she pounded the steering wheel with both fists. Then she burst our weeping. Tossing her hair, sending her tears through the air, she roared the motor and hurled the Fiat away from the curb and into the traffic.

In his room, before the mirror, he checked his puffed face. There would probably be scars, the doctor had said.

Perhaps, Ben thought, ruffling his thin hair to cover the bald spot, perhaps he'd grow a beard. He was lucky, his beard grew quickly. And a beard would conceal most of the scars. □

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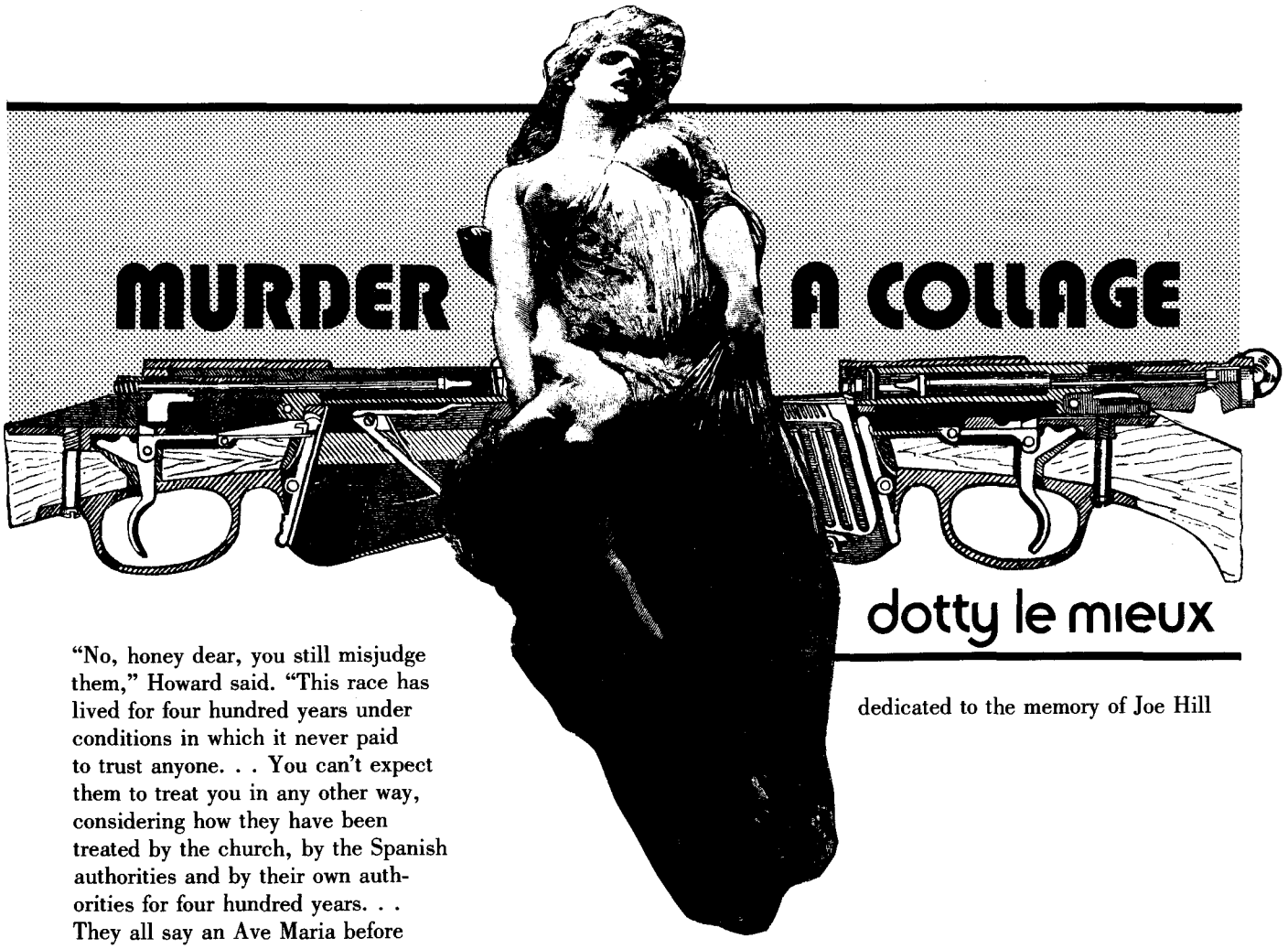

MURDER A COLLAGE

dotty le mieux

"No, honey dear, you still misjudge them," Howard said. "This race has lived for four hundred years under conditions in which it never paid to trust anyone. . . You can't expect them to treat you in any other way, considering how they have been treated by the church, by the Spanish authorities and by their own authorities for four hundred years. . . They all say an Ave Maria before killing you. . ."

—B. Traven, *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*

dedicated to the memory of Joe Hill

1. Why is Murder?
For the commonest of reasons: for an eye, or a tooth; for passion, greed or power. property.

Simple people kill simply: because it was once done to an uncle, because they put in a twelve hour day assembling airplane parts, just to see how it feels to put on a big thumb.

How is Murder?
Most effectively by bombs from a distance.

Those who dare do it themselves. He wondered what it was like to eat the flesh of a man, so he tried it. The taste was not bad, but he had no desire to do it again.

MURDER, A COLLAGE

2. Why is Murder?
Bombs are most effective.

Guns work.

For those who dare, knives are adequate, though messy. Some people prefer to use whatever is at hand.

How is Murder?
The classic motivations, for instance lust, greed, and salvation, are still the most popular.

Self-defense is a strong argument, though hard to prove in court.

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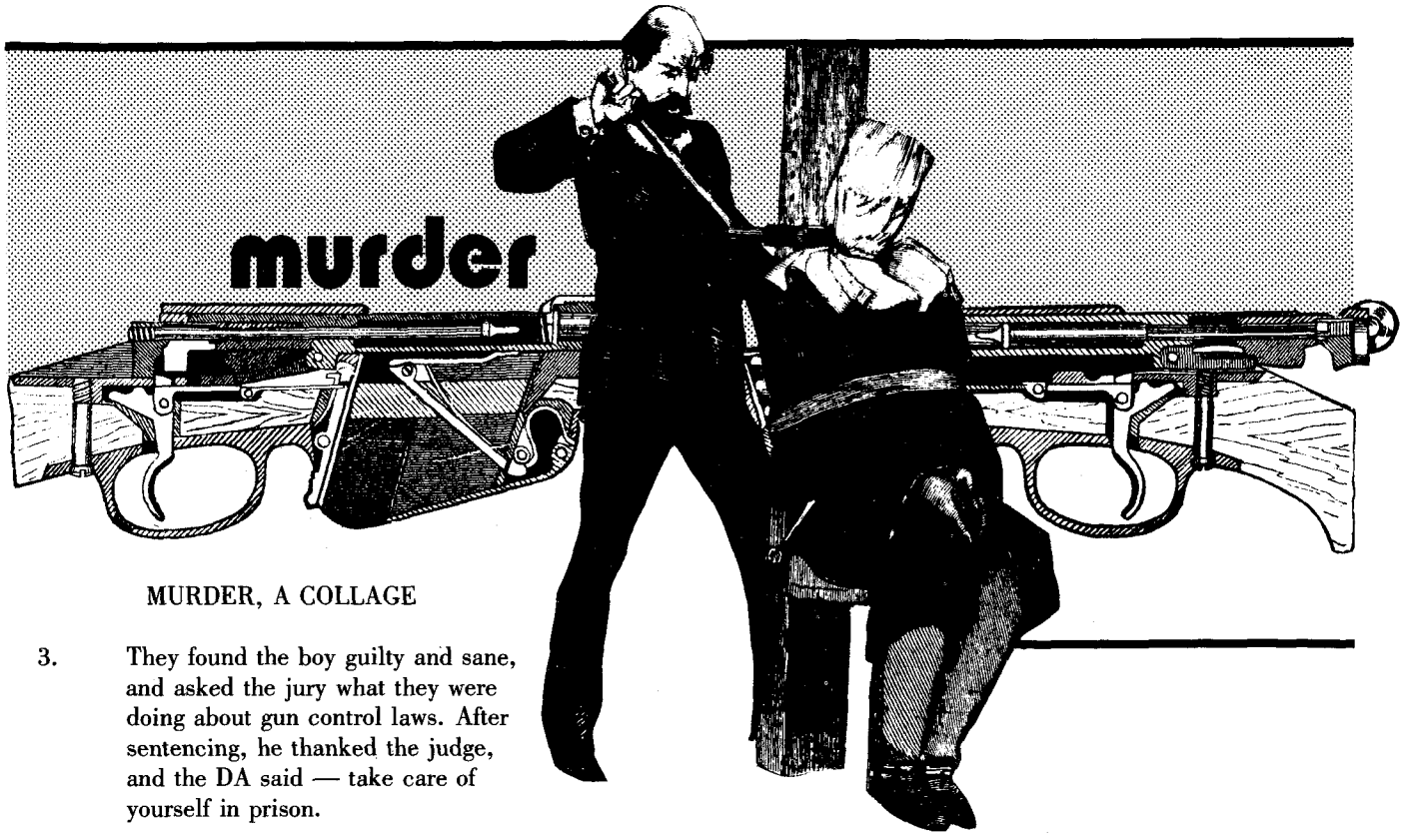

MURDER, A COLLAGE

3. They found the boy guilty and sane,
and asked the jury what they were
doing about gun control laws. After
sentencing, he thanked the judge,
and the DA said — take care of
yourself in prison.

He wanted to experience all his
fantasies, the eating of human
flesh, for example. He said —
it was the only way they could
be all mine. You see, he was
not a handsome man.

MURDER, A COLLAGE

4. It has been said, by those who should know, that
Man is the only animal who kills for sport,
lust, or monetary gain.

The jury wants to know: do you kill for
gain or for revenge?

I don't know, Sir. This isn't my war. I kill
to keep from being killed. And that's a
fact.

He then leapt the rail, and yelling — Death
to the State!, struck the foreman
sharply on the left temple, and ran out
the door, making his getaway in a waiting
hearse.

He just wondered about the texture.
Do not be alarmed. He cooked it
well first. It was the only way
they could be all his.

5. MURDER. . .

ponders its reflection in alleys.
Wears a bright face in the White House.
Wears a death mask in South Boston.
Drives a cab or hires one.
Draws elaborate maps and X's out villages.
Walks alone in daylight whistling.
Passes laws for the protection of the people.
Stands close enough to press the assassin's bullet
gently into the neck, then walk offstage grinning.
Likes to watch the fingers and toes drop off first.
Handles dirty meat artfully.
Flies a big prick over backward places and rains
down poisoned come over all the people.
Pays well, and often in advance.
Is gaining in popularity among the middle classes.
Is exceptionally well read.
Is done most effectively by bombs from a good
safe distance.

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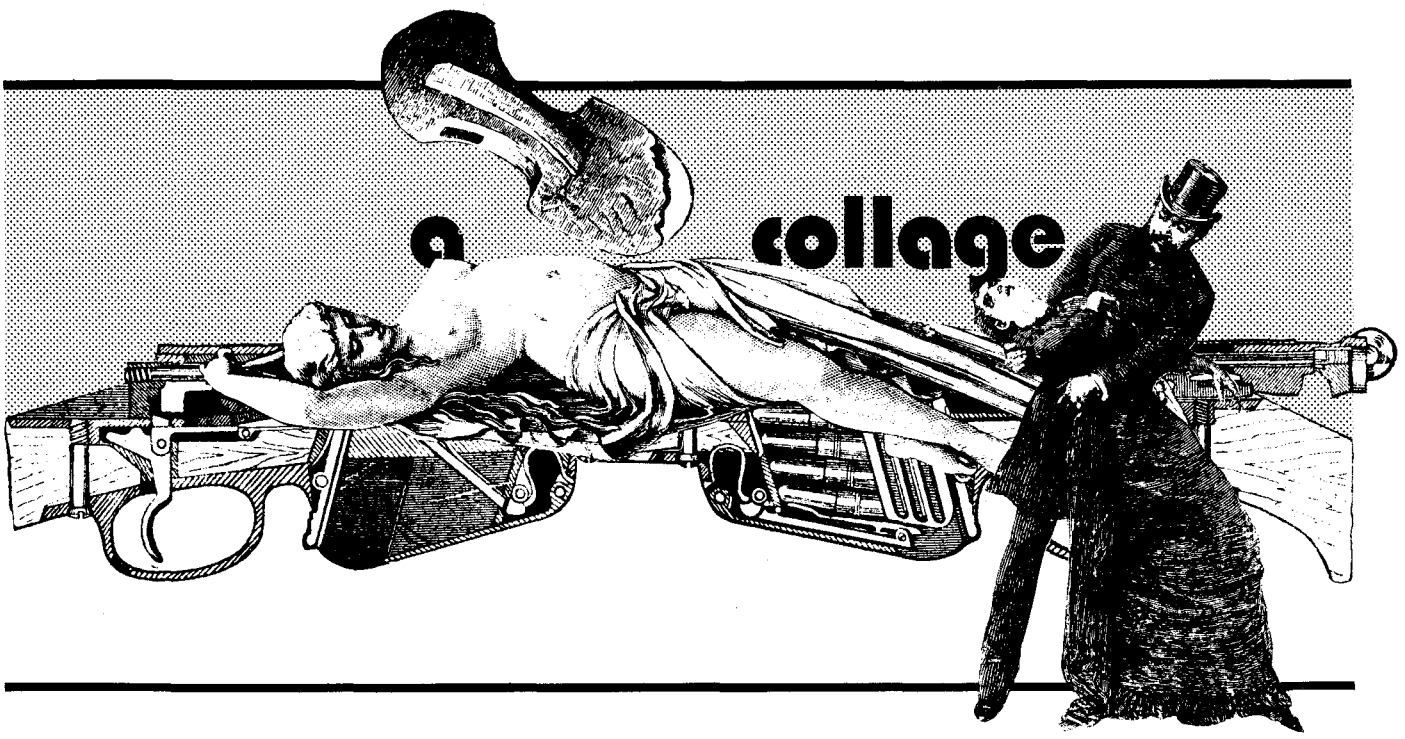

MURDER, A COLLAGE

6. . . .A COLLAGE

Or by lackeys
in quackey boots
with killee guns

See the little lackeys
all in a row
Sorry little lackeys
Waiting in Death Row

GI issue lackeys
crawling through the mud
Submissive little lackeys
Sopping up the blood

Poor little lackeys
Got nowhere to go
If they go a little wackey
It's not supposed to show

Or OFF goes the lackey
to the nuthouse or the pen
Or OFF with his head
And start all over again.

7. Can always turn the page if the photograph bothers you. The same holds true for news broadcasts.

They found her body mutilated and
stripped and held a debate on the
spot as to whether she had been
sexually molested. First they had
to wipe the scream from her face
to calm the atmosphere.

If you kill me, I have no alternative
but to kill you back. But why don't
you hold still for it? If not,
pehaps this lonely old lady will.
I'll give her thirty whacks, and
if that's not enough, I'll toss
this poisoned meat to her dogs.

At the press conference we learned
it had all been done for the sake
of national security. Those who had
lost their sons or daughters or
dogs were most relieved. The
President smiled down at the
throng. You have made the highest
sacrifice for your country — he
said, ordering the soldiers to
fire into the crowd. The cheers
could be heard for miles. Unfor-
tunately, the countryside outside
the capital was empty of all
life forms, save a few cows who
munched the tough grass and
mooed their approval.

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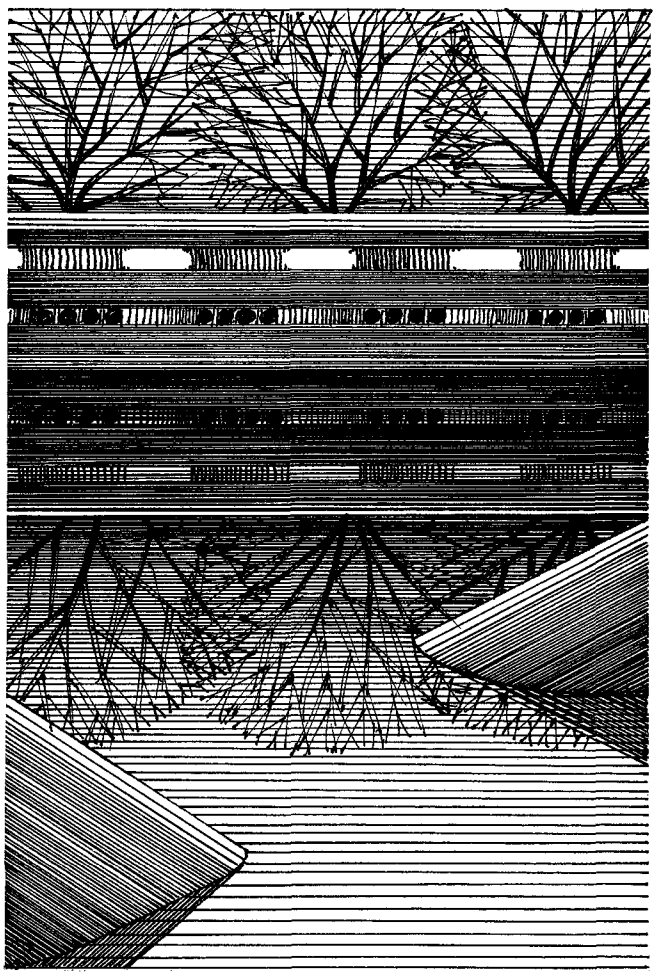

THE ORDINARY DAY

A STORY BY MARINA TRENIN

There is no *you* here. Only last things said into the words as they snap themselves out on the page like bullet holes in a target. No approaches by implication or the finger darting suddenly into the nostril of the unsuspecting reader.

If an "I" seems to be running things from here on, it's out of respect for what the mind makes up to keep things going. So, yes: *I*.

Now the problem of tense. Though the truth demands past, should an insinuation into the present make up for the lack of the *you?* To make this seem to belong, a possible *now:* concessions, a dose of processional AM and IS.

"I am embracing a dangerous shadow which demands my respect by discarding everything it passes over. There is snow falling over us and the shadow of snow which is like the agony of a butterfly caught in the invisible jar of the sky." Very pretty and untrustworthy. But never as remorseless as the location near the rundown all night diner we are approaching out of need for an authentic Where for these remarks.

And there is history too: "if she had not disappeared while walking in broad daylight without a proper parasol and wearing her dime store perfume. . . ." And the story could go on to make clear which failure contributed to the inevitable downfall of nobody in particular.

But what is beginning actually takes place in a bed. In this bed, I am not falling asleep. Pardon me if I am not alone. And this *together* is causing also, without pardon, a curious pain identifiable as a returning fantasy of a man and a woman before a full length mirror.

The man, who is naturally taller, puts a revolver into the right hand of the woman and guides her arm to the space between her stare and the idea of curtains moving gently behind them in the room. His body behind her matches hers by bending into the space he forces at the back of her knees. He is very careful.

"Yes, like a handshake," he says, fitting her hand to the metal. "Firmly. Like a welcome to someone you thought never to see again, but suddenly here they are again and the surprise too much to let you embrace."

The woman is experiencing the floor acutely under the weight of his body like a hand over hers, her ankles and feet taking in the gun-weight from the wrist.

"Your legs farther apart. Imagine a river between them." She opens her legs.

To keep the eye emptied of its other she splits herself down from the part of her hair where it falls to both sides. How has she neglected this small space between separate visions?

"The hands are only what the eye makes of them. Squeeze now, steadily as though you expected nothing to happen."

The hammer is back. The face has stayed in the mirror. The distance between the eyes seems to be closing, wrapped in the vision between them. The man, the woman.

"The breath is part of this. Take it in with the trigger, but only as you think of it, attached to the bullet. As next, as going out from the mind."

His left hand has anchored her left hand to the grip of the right. If the gun could fly she would break into a thousand pieces behind it. They are so still. She has never felt motion like this. Compression toward the impossible word: *Now*.

Then it is over. Her face, somehow, still in her eyes, staying. As though the mirror were a slender strip of eternity matched to a memory which keeps her, as the room and the curtains drifting over the bedstead from the window keep her.

I am still in the bed. The man is next to me, as the man is not with the woman still in the mirror. That man has disappeared like the bullet or the thought of the bullet.

"Can you tell when I don't feel?" I have asked this of the man who has just finished with something obedient. He pretends an important star has broken through the night in the window. For a while we are listening to it die just outside our speaking.

"Yes," he says.

"Just now? Was it for me too?"

"No. No, you didn't."

The train which surrounds the lake each night at this hour goes rushing through the room, though we have not seen or

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MARINA TRENIN writes that she is of Russian parentage, and that her real ambition is "to speak aloud as little as possible."

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touched it. After a while I get up. I don't know where to go. A suitcase is open on the bed near the window. I stand by it. I am naked and the branches wash over me. I am as small as the star which has diminished to a gleam in the growing universe of the room.

The suitcase doesn't know where to go either. It lies on the smaller bed and the sleeves and collars edge out of it like obscene tongues. It has been like this for two days. A reunion. The man is my husband and he says, "Where are you going?"

I slip on his shirt. It feels thin and hangs half-way to my knees. "Don't be so dramatic," he says.

I go into the hallway walking barefoot on the board floors to the bathroom. I think of the couple sleeping in the guest room next door to us. For their sleep, I think of making myself okay. I wash my face and the cold water shouts a little on my cheeks and forehead. It remembers my harshness at dinner, the friend of my husband who talks of going to the city where the Zen Master has beaten him on the shoulders.

"If I hadn't had Zen, I don't know what I'd have done after my divorce," he says.

"I don't believe in it," I say. "Isn't it a sexual cop-out?"

"I hadn't thought of it like that."

"Men are terrified of how the woman feels her sex now," I say. "They can't stand how it seems as much as theirs. They don't know what to do. So they meditate."

"You may be right," he says. "Still, I couldn't live without my meditations."

I can't find a towel and the water streams to my elbows. I don't feel right about anything. The pain of the man and the woman in the mirror returns a little as I catch sight of myself over the sink in my husband's slouched shoulders and the pointed collar open to my breasts. I seem to have died somewhere very suddenly between one glance and the next. I know it by the way I think of going back to bed, as though nothing has happened, as though I had not spoken and he had made no acknowledgement.

On the way back down the hall my feet are good little beasts. Yes, they say to my body. Yes, yes. Back to bed where you belong. Back to bed so he won't come for you. Bed. Bed and the vicious warmth of his body's touching and not touching. The train rushes like a distant maniac to the opposite side of the lake. My body makes its own plan. It will go on with a terrible kindness answering all that is asked of it. It will meet pretense with pretense like the mirror couple pretending to see what they do.

The curtains approve. They sweep out like a breath in the room crossed and recrossed by the bare branches of the trees in moonlight.

In my sleep I feel my body breaking loose in the room, mixing with the moonlight. Near morning the train circles the lake again and I know my sleep as the lake, a still center around which a contained violence is moving at great speed.

We get up. We don't say much except to look at each other's clothes to see if we look okay for breakfast with our host. Dressing myself is like dressing a goose. No reason for it, but I do it anyway. Not even my breasts feel neglect. There is lake water under my skin. He has noticed nothing peculiar.

In the oval mirror I rub a dab of lip rouge into my cheek and think of a stranger. Elsewhere, the dressing of a corpse. The flesh, warm and breathing under finger tips. Or if the corpse talked a little and said things like: "Actually it was about time. I have no regrets, except for my young daughter. I'm afraid she won't remember. But if we live only to be remembered, isn't it time?" and so on.

Quite another thing, to be walking around with all one's parts intact, unsmelling, unperturbable, with an insane zest for the smallest motion.

Our host is tossing generous handfuls of bread crumbs onto the fenced porch overlooking the lake. The lake pretends to have nothing to do with me, just as the birds in the trees at first pretend to have nothing to do with the crumbs littering the porch.

"Some of these birds only feed on the ground," our host explains. "Strange how they fear what they sense through the windows, the hand going up to the face, the sudden swing of one leg over another."

"There are birds who think they can fly through windows," my husband says. "If the sky is home, it's no wonder you don't recognize barriers."

"So the lake is like the birds," I said. "It takes everything in, sky or birds. It doesn't have a say."

Our host brushes his hand through his thick white hair. He points out the ducks on the lake as he brings his hand down from his head.

"These ducks come only in the winter. I don't know why they don't go south with the rest."

I am not minding the ducks on the lake. I am not minding anything. All through breakfast I think of the eggs and toast as some old formality. But I do not mind. My hands come to me out of a great distance, very purely and accurately: now the fork, now the butter smoothed along the crust. Quite possibly one could spend a life in such blissful suspension. Even the swirls in the long walnut table under our plates enter into it, though no one attracts their attention by mentioning it.

After breakfast our host takes us down his steep private stairs to the lake bank.

We come to the railroad tracks, the men walking a little ahead. They cross the tracks. I stay with the dull cold edges. Then I am up on them like a child and so, walking, arms balancing the small distance from rail to ground, moving near the lake that has been my sleep.

Love Love Love! I want to sing. No wanting to feel *with* and the loss of it. Or something hanging in the mirror not listening to all those instructions, sullen as the face of the woman with the revolver disregarding the perfect shot.

Thinking then of myself as a strange ground-bird who walks only on railroad tracks. The men call to me from the lake side. Our host has brought bread crusts which he uses to tempt the ducks toward shore.

My eyes follow my feet. There is something small, something small and ridiculous on the rail. A penny. Flattened. But nonetheless a penny.

No balancing now, but stopped. A hole carved perfectly in the mirror where one eye has covered the other between the man and the woman. No shattering behind what has taken her, and both of them looking through to the hole in the wall behind the mirror where the light of the ordinary day spills into the room. The body coming back then as itself, as not to be denied, as somebodies' child with a fresh brown penny and the face of the man flattening beside a lake into the distance of the train eating its own breath into the trees.

The sky goes on like this for a long time. □

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GARY SOTO

COPPER

Leonard's wallet yawned open
And toothless, and the morning
Coughed from an empty shelf.
We walked dirt alleys after mass,
Collecting copper.
In the gravel yard, near the tracks,
We yanked out wire from the dashboards
Of buckled trucks, coiled tubing
And the short-throated pipes
Furred in oil. After selling
On the Westside, we went home
And napped where there was shade.

Today, we are bloated on beer,
Glowing before a snowy TV.
Outside, snow slants into the street.
We laugh at nights we slept
Cold, in coats,
And I hugged a cat
That smelled like a broom—
Slugs laced the floor with silver.
If it were warm outside or we drunker
And swearing in the name of Christ
Or the Connie tattooed on Leonard's arm,
We would pick through an alley
Until we spotted copper
Among the refuse—
Lift it like a sacrament,
And carry it homeward.

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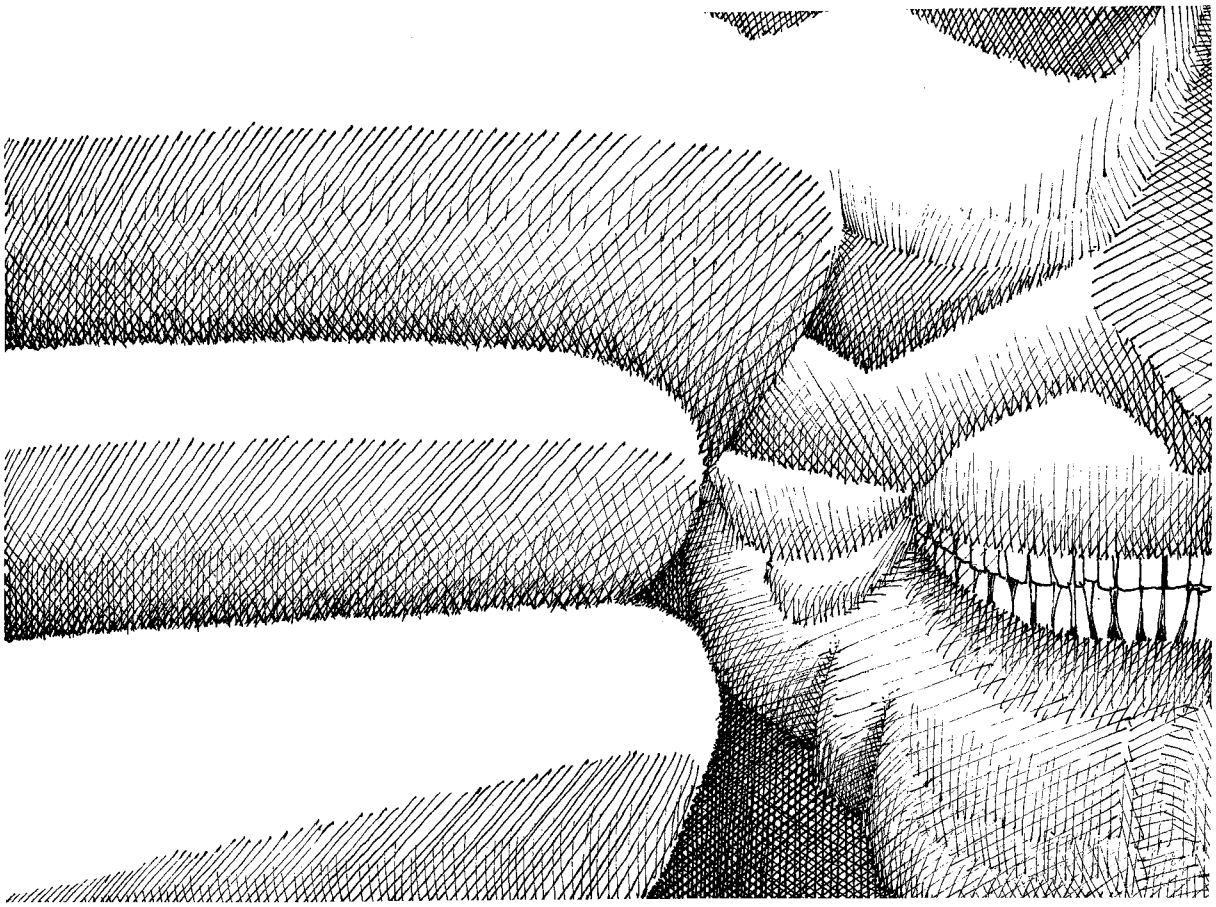

The argument: that life is indeed bizarre, vicious, futile . . . *all* that, and therefore to be spoofed by

Andrew Clark
John Morgan
T. Coraghessan Boyle
W. J. Holinger

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ANDREW CLARK teaches drama at Laval University, Québec. He has published jazz criticism, travel articles, and fiction in North America and Britain.

Andrew Clark

PINTER'S MAIN COURSE

A living-room. Door to kitchen, up center. Door to bedroom, up left. Door to bedroom, up right.

Spare modern furniture. A tubular steel table, glass top; tubular steel-frame sofa, black leather seat and cushions; light pinewood frame settee, oatmeal tweed upholstery; table lights of white raffia and silk. Cork floor, cedar board surround.

JAKE, in his thirties, sits on sofa, smoking cigarette, fingering stem of sherry glass.

LUCILLA, in her thirties, enters through kitchen door, center. She is dressed in an extremely tight, short black leather skirt, black fishnet stockings, and black, very high-heeled shoes. She sits down opposite JAKE, on settee, exposing a considerable expanse of thigh.

JAKE.
You've finished, then?

LUCILLA.
Mmmm?

JAKE.
You've finished it?

LUCILLA.
Finished what?

JAKE.
Whatever you were . . . doing.

Pause.

LUCILLA.
Doing?

JAKE.
You know. Doing.

Pause.

Done.

LUCILLA.
Oh, that.

Pause.

Yes. It's done.

JAKE.
It's finished then, is it?

LUCILLA.
Yes. All done.

Pause.

Now.

Silence. JAKE pours a drink for himself.

JAKE.
What is?

LUCILLA.
Mmmm?

JAKE.
What's . . . all done with?

Pause.

Now.

LUCILLA.
You know.

Pause.

The cooking.

JAKE.
The cooking?

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LUCILLA.
All that thing.

Pause.

Yes.

Pause.

JAKE.
You've cooked it, then?

LUCILLA.
Mmmm?

JAKE.
The thing. It's cooked?

LUCILLA.
Cooked?

Pause.

What's . . . cooked?

JAKE *(firmly).*
The casserole.

Pause.

LUCILLA
I didn't know what to do with it.

Pause.

You know how it is.

Pause.

Yes, of course it's cooked. Why shouldn't it be?

JAKE.
Well . . . you know . . .

Pause.

LUCILLA *(forcefully).*
Trouble is . . . it was . . . getting out of hand.

JAKE.
Out of hand?

LUCILLA.
Yes. You know.

Pause.

Quite out of hand . . . of control.

JAKE.
Well, it's never exactly *in* hand, is it?

LUCILLA.
Mmmm?

JAKE.
I mean, there's quite a lot of it to manage.

Pause.

There's a great deal to it. To control.

LUCILLA.
Oh, I see.

Pause.

Yes, there's much to it . . . or rather *of* it, I should say . . . Mmmmmm.

Silence. JAKE takes a big swallow of his drink.

JAKE *(energetically).*
Well, is it a good casserole which you've made? I mean . . . which you've finished?

LUCILLA
Mmmm?

JAKE
I mean, is it the kind of casserole we'll . . . enjoy? Eating.

LUCILLA.
When?

JAKE.
When? Why, when the time . . . comes, of course.

Pause.

When it's ready.

LUCILLA.
Oh, I should say so.

Pause.

Sufficiently. You know.

Pause.

JAKE
Big enough for two, for example?

Pause.

LUCILLA.
For two?

Pause.

Oh, yes . . . for two.

Pause.

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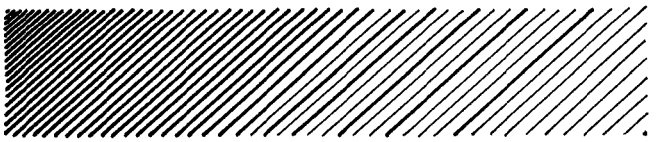


I should think so.

JAKE.
For the two of . . . us?

LUCILLA.
Us? Well, it's all rather a matter of size, usually.

She rises to fetch an ashtray and light a cigarette.

And then there's the question of adequate appetite.

Pause.

You know. How much it's wanted. Needed.

Pause.

That sort of thing.

JAKE (*quickly*).
Must be the air here. You need plenty of good food in the country, don't you? Yes. A matter of air.

Pause.

Plenty of frequent casseroles.

Silence. LUCILLA pours herself a drink.

LUCILLA.
And then there's . . . other dishes.

Silence. JAKE takes a very large swallow of his drink.

JAKE.
What *other* dishes?

LUCILLA.
Well, a casserole's only a casserole, all said and done.

JAKE
It is?

LUCILLA.
You can keep on filling it up, of course. You can maintain quite a variety of fillings. Almost an infinite variety of types and sizes and . . . things to fill it with.

Pause.

Yes, you can maintain that . . . . But there does come a time when you say, you have to say, that's it, that's the lot, that's all you can humanly do. There's a limit. The thing's played out, exhausted, filled to the brim. Overflowing with variety.

Pause.

Satiated.

JAKE. (*fingering stem of glass*).
So you . . . say . . . you say lay off the casserole for a bit. For a while.

Pause.

Is that it?

LUCILLA.
Mmmm?

JAKE.
I said, what you're saying is . . . less frequent partaking of the casserole.

LUCILLA. (*lightly*).
Finish it up entirely. Forget how to do it. Try a change of scenery. Of environment.

Pause.

A change of dish.

LUCILLA draws languidly on a freshly-lit cigarette.

JAKE (*pouring large drink*).
That's a . . . rather a . . . radical proposition, wouldn't you say?

LUCILLA.
What is?

JAKE.
That.

Pause.

A . . . change.

Pause. Takes swallow of his drink.

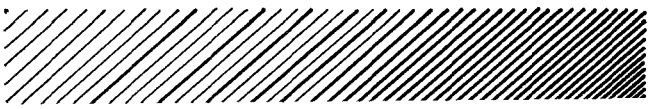
LUCILLA.
Well, it's quite easy, really, for me. Quite a feasible proposition, in fact.

Pause.

Yes. I could, for example, for a start, try my left-over calf's livers. On skewers. Or perhaps hunter's quail. You know, with the *croutons* and garnish.

Pause.

And then there's my speciality, of course. My very own thing.



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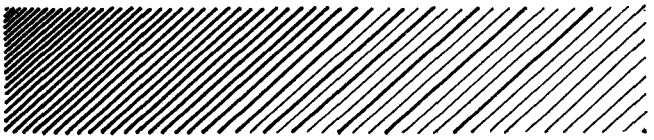


JAKE.
What's . . . that?

LUCILLA.
Stuffed artichoke bottoms.

JAKE.
Stuffed what?

LUCILLA *(with emphasis)*.
Bottoms.

JAKE *(quickly)*.
Look, why not something a trifle less . . . You know . . . exotic. More homely.

Pause.

Simple.

LUCILLA.
Simple?

JAKE.
Well, something of substance, something of . . . solidity. Like salt cod. Or beef balls.

LUCILLA.
Beef what?

JAKE *(quickly)*.
Or turnips.

Pause.

LUCILLA
Mmmm . . .

JAKE.
Of course, I might just stretch to a nice piece of grilled breast.

Pause.

Or maybe a shoulder or leg of something. Lamb. And then I could wash the whole thing down with . . . with a bit of hot grog. How about that?

Silence. JAKE takes swallow of his drink.

LUCILLA.
Aren't you rather forgetting something?

JAKE.
Do I?

Pause.

Have I?

LUCILLA.
I should think so . . . if I were you. I should rather think so, yes . . . in your . . . position.

Pause.

You seem to forget . . .

Pause.

JAKE.
What?

LUCILLA.
Mmmm?

JAKE
I'm forgetting what, then? What have I forgotten?

LUCILLA *(laughing lightly)*.
Well, after all, isn't *I* who dispense such things. Isn't *I* who slave in the kitchen? Cooking up these enormously, incredibly succulent dishes, these fabulous courses, concocting culinary wonders of finest *haute cuisine*?

Pause

For instance . . . for example . . . my eel with tartar sauce . . . my potted hare . . . my truffled partridge?

Pause.

Mmmm?

JAKE *(edgily)*.
Well, of course, there are your frills to account for. You do have your little . . . how shall I say, extras? I will admit.

LUCILLA.
Extras? Isn't that the essence of it all, the quintessential core? Decoration and presentation. That's what's . . . required.

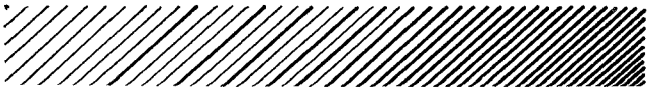
Pause.

Pricking the pie crusts . . . beating the sauce . . . working up the whipped cream . . .

Pause.

Mixing the spicy surprise . . . moistening the sponge fingers . . . kneading the dough . . .

Pause.



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Yes. All that kind of . . . art. That special thing.

JAKE (*uneasily*).
But . . . wouldn't you . . . you know . . . say that's a trifle . . . uh . . . you know . . .

LUCILLA.
Overdone? A little *piquante*?

JAKE.
Well, the simple, regular fare, the reliable old casserole has always . . . you know . . . sufficed.

Pause.

For me.

LUCILLA.
For *you*? That may be so. That may well be the case.

Pause.

Very much the actual situation.

Pause.

Yes. Indeed.

JAKE.
Well, sufficient even for . . . *us*.

Pause. JAKE takes a swallow of his drink.

LUCILLA.
But what about our . . . friends? Our visitors?

Pause.

After all, we, I mean *I*, must look after the visitors. Our, I mean *my*, guests. Those who demand something extra special, something exquisite in their tastes, that little bit of *savoir faire* which goes . . . you know . . . so far.

Silence. JAKE pours a very large drink for himself. He slumps on sofa.

JAKE (*at length*).
Roast beef will suffice.

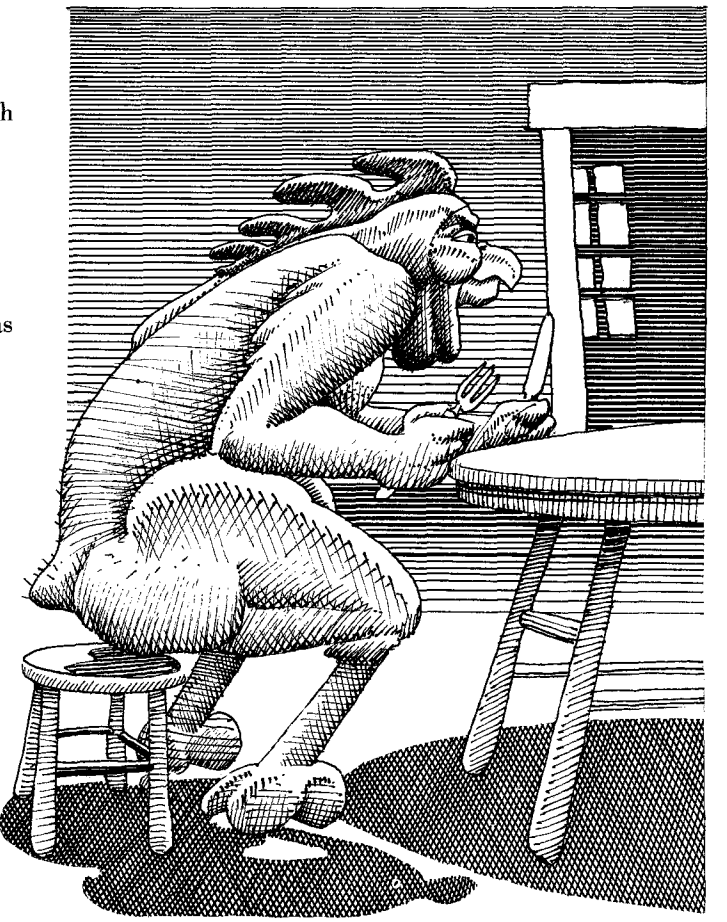
LUCILLA.
Not at all.

Pause. LUCILLA stands.

Goose liver paté.

JAKE.
Dumplings.

LUCILLA.
Meringue lady fingers with vanilla icing.



JAKE.
Shepherd's pie.

LUCILLA.
Asparagus and kidney omelette.

JAKE.
Kippers.

LUCILLA.
Flaky apple turnovers.

JAKE.
Bread pudding.

LUCILLA.
Filled pastry squares.

JAKE.
Rock cake.

LUCILLA.
Sweetbread balls and parsley.

JAKE.
Cornflakes.

LUCILLA.
Clotted cream puffs.

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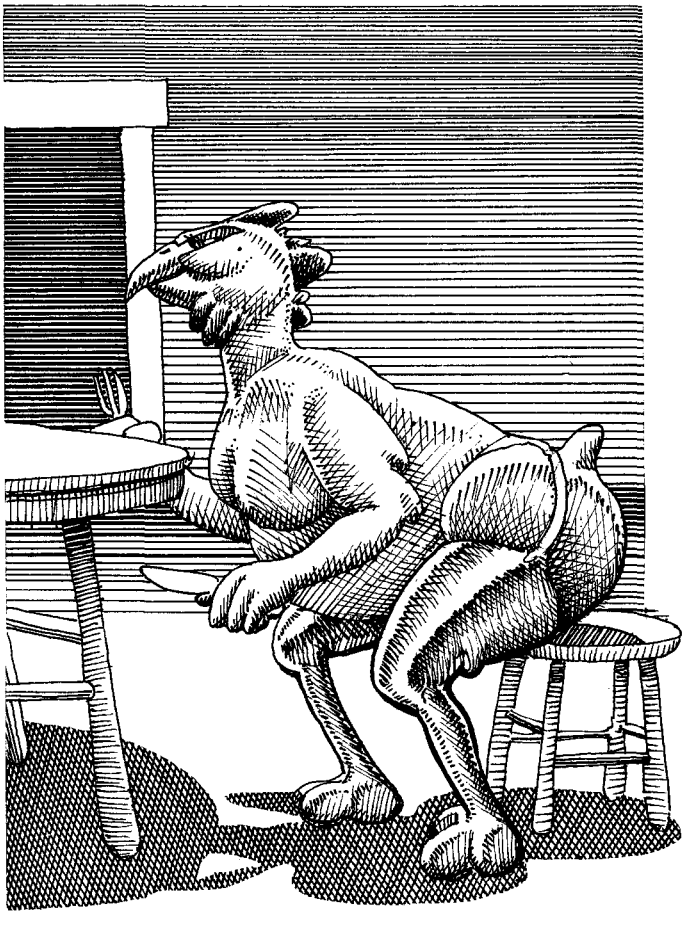

JAKE.
Tart.

LUCILLA.
Classic jam.

JAKE.
Not at all.

Pause. JAKE rises.

Gravy.

Long silence. LUCILLA lights fresh cigarette, draws languidly. JAKE bends down to take a very large swallow of his drink. They both sit down, facing each other.

LUCILLA.
Jake?

JAKE.
Lucilla?

LUCILLA.
It's finished.

JAKE.
What's . . . finished?

LUCILLA.
You know.

Pause.

It's made.

JAKE.
Done?

LUCILLA.
Of course.

Pause.

All done.

Pause.

Now.

JAKE.
Ready, then?

LUCILLA.
Naturally. Of course it's ready.

Silence.

JAKE
What is?

LUCILLA.
Mmmm?

JAKE.
What's all . . . done with?

Pause.

What's all . . . ready?

LUCILLA.
You know.

Pause.

The cooking.

LUCILLA stands and moves slightly toward the bedroom, top right. JAKE stands.

JAKE.
Casserole . . . is it?

They stand gazing intently at each other, then move slowly toward the bedroom, arm in arm.

Long silence.

CURTAIN

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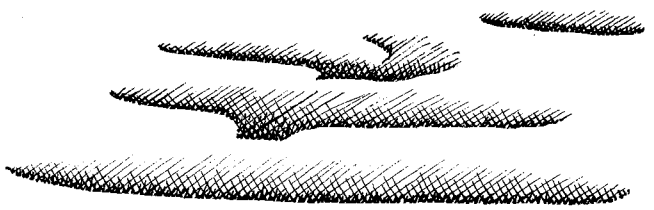
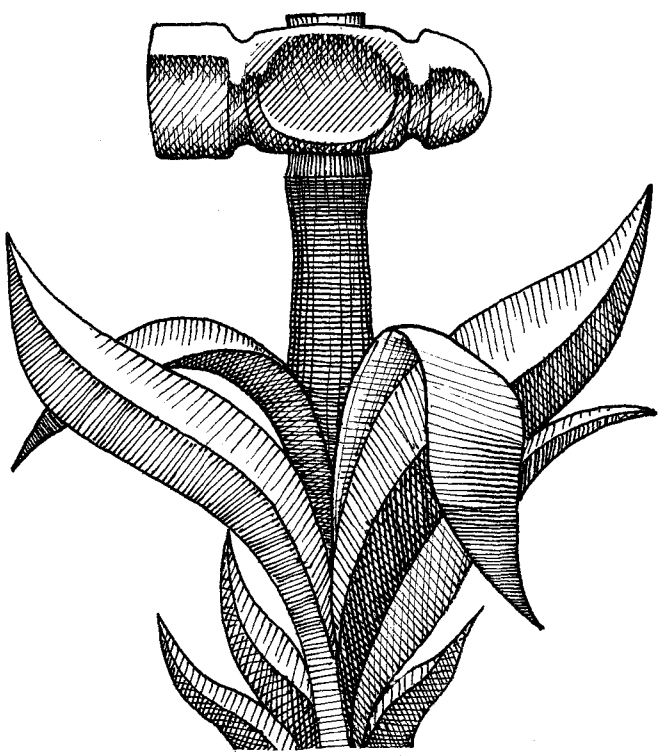
JOHN MORGAN has written The Nancy Poems, *and is also a novelist. He lives in Kent Cliffs, New York, with—he says—his wife, "two cats, and 'the slug'." Presently he is a visiting lecturer at Vassar.*



And what is good, Phaedo,
And what is not good—
Need we ask anyone to tell us these things?

John Morgan

ZEN AND THE ART OF LAWNMOWER MAINTENANCE



I can see by my watch, without taking my hand from the grip of the mower, that it is eight-thirty in the morning. Already it is hot and muggy, and I have to wonder what it's going to be like later on. In the air is the pungent odor of cut grass.

You see things when you're pushing a mower that you'd miss at any other time. Lying on a hammock, for instance, you are aware primarily of the sky and perhaps the leaves on the intervening branches of the trees, but now, as I make the turn at the far end of the yard, leaning into it and adjusting almost unconsciously to the contours of the land, I am aware of the earth, of the possibility of twigs and stones which might get caught in the blades of the mower, and I am aware of the grass itself, of its textures which vary from the bleached straw-like grass in the sunny hot-spots to the lush green thick stuff where a proper balance of sun and shade has been achieved, to the damp ferny growths of the deep shade where toadstools are likely to crop up.

As I circle back up toward the house I notice that my son, Chris, has come out and is sitting in the hammock reading one of his comic books. I have in mind a few things I've been meaning to tell the boy—a sort of lecture—but I haven't yet been able to find the right time for it. Maybe today.

Another thing you have to look out for when you're mowing a lawn is what in the ancient traditions of the Far East is known as "night soil." This is a substance which has great significance in a culture where thousands of years of tillage have depleted the land of its natural fertility. It is a means of restoring health to the land, but for us today it has a somewhat different meaning. Mainly, I'm looking out not to run the machine over a mound of "night soil" left by our dog, Phaedo, because the blades of the mower can churn the stuff up and splatter it all over the place.

When I got up this morning I found myself thinking about Phaedo. I often dream of him, and last night was no exception. In my dream Chris and his mother are standing on the other side of a glass door looking in at Phaedo and me. I am holding Phaedo on a leash, and Chris is yelling at me, "What are you doing with my dog?" But then a black curtain falls over the door and I wake up in a sweat.

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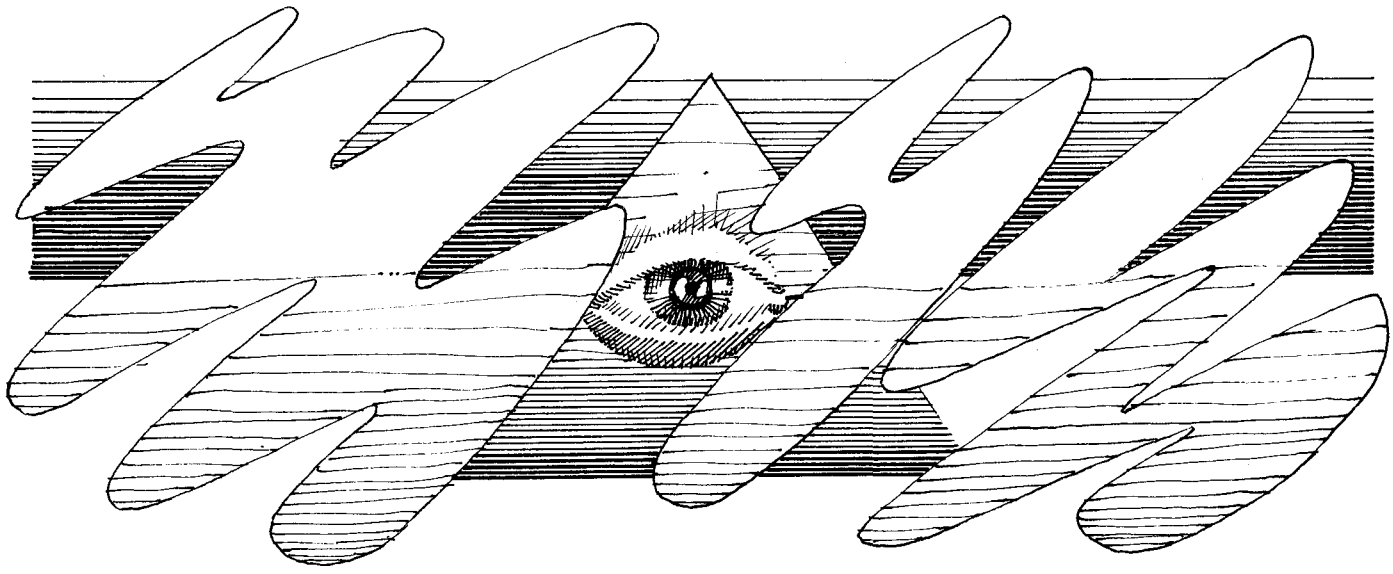

There is a special technique which took me many years to master for starting a lawnmower. Unlike the old-fashioned hand mower, a power mower must have gasoline. This is clearly specified in the manual, but as with all other manuals this one leaves out an essential fact. That fact is Quality. I happen to know this because I write manuals myself. (For example, I wrote the University of Chicago's famous 'Style Manual,' and I can tell you first hand that you will find nothing in that manual pertaining to Quality. It has very little to do with style either.)

As I circle past the hammock I see that Chris has put his comic book aside and that his eyes are shut. I sense that this is not the time to talk.

That there is something wrong with our relationship I have long suspected. When he looks at me I can see the pain. He says the pain is in his stomach, but I know it's psychological because it only comes up when I start talking about the necessity of mowing lawns. He can't be expected to be aware of this connection himself. After all, he's only eleven.

And now out of the corner of my eye I see him, the one I fear: *Phaedo*.

That dog is not like any other. He got his name because it was my understanding that in Greek Phaedo means "wolf." And it is a fact that he incorporates many of the qualities of *wolfness* in his being. Recently, however, a friend informed me that I was wrong and that Phaedo does not mean "wolf " in Greek. Upon learning this all the gumption went out of me and I drove around the streets of this town feeling that to turn left or right, to stop or go was of no importance whatever. Chris sat beside me and gave directions. Fortunately, he knows where we live. I tried to explain to him that I had simply gotten two of Plato's dialogues mixed up. A natural mistake. But I feel that he has never forgiven me. I know that is one of the sources of my recurrent bad dream.

As Phaedo approaches across the lawn I shut off the machine and retreat into the house: I am wiser than to tangle with him in my present state. Though I used to teach rhetoric at the University, there is nothing I could say to that dog that would deter him. Even at his present distance he catches my scent and I can see him baring his fangs.

I would long since have gotten rid of him if it were not for Chris.

Later in the day I glance out the window and notice that Phaedo is no longer on the front lawn. Unfortunately, it is now raining. The rain is good for the grass, but not so good for the mower which I had left outside.

Chris comes into the house. He is wet and sullen and he displays his comic book which has been partially devoured—by Phaedo, I suspect, but I don't say this. Chris is in no mood to hear his pet defamed. I ask him to go out again and take the lawnmower to the garage, but he complains of stomach pains.

Realizing that this is not the time for our talk, I go out into the rain myself. In the driveway, as I am pushing the machine ahead of me, I encounter Phaedo. He growls and the hair on the back of his neck bristles. I can feel dampness on my arms and shoulders. The machine is also wet. So is Phaedo.

"Phaedo," I say, "I think it is time we should talk. I know it's not your fault that you're a dog. But you should realize that it's not my fault either that I'm a man. That's just how things happen to be."

His response is immediate. His growling stops and he begins to wag his tail. It's obvious that at last he understands and has accepted me. I put out my hand and he comes over and nuzzles it—for the first time.

Trials never end, of course. Unhappiness and misfortune are bound to occur as long as people and dogs live, but there is a feeling now, that was not here before, and is not just on the surface of things, but penetrates all the way through: We've won it. It's going to get better now. You can sort of tell these things. □

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MISE EN SCENE

By T. Coraghessan Boyle

A tree, center stage, its branches bare and withered. To the right a cluster of papier-mâché boulders, their crowns touched with white paint to suggest snow. A strip of yellowed meadow grass, a wilted wildflower. To the left stage front a solitary boulder, larger than the others, large enough to conceal a standing man. The backdrop is a mountain scene: Jungfrau, Matterhorn, Dufourspitz. THE STAG hangs from the tree by its rear hoofs, a puddle of stage-blood on the floor beneath its tongue. There is the sound of wind.

THE YOUNG MAN enters from stage left, in alpine gear. His face is smooth as glass, his eyes blue as bullets. The wind has tossed his flaxen hair, and he is breathing heavily. His makeup runs with sweat. He makes as if to throw himself down on the strip of yellowed grass, but starts at a sound from offstage right. Hallooing is heard in the distance. He drops THE BABY and darts behind the boulders in the rear, crouched on all fours. THE BABY wails in two quick bursts like an automatic weapon, then cuts to a gagging mewl and begins crawling toward THE STAG. THE BABY comes to rest beneath the dripping tongue. It sleeps.

THE DWARF enters from right, his back bowed beneath a mahogany table. His face is as furrowed as THE YOUNG MAN's is smooth. His eyes are black. When he sets the table down just to the right of the tree, the legs screech. He lifts his Tyrolean hat and wipes his brow. Then hurries off stage right, like a man on an errand.

THE YOUNG MAN begins to emerge but ducks back when THE GIRL rushes in, her hair in braids. She looks wildly about her, then digs in her petticoat and produces a watch which she consults in great agitation. Then her eyes fall on THE BABY puddled in blood, and she faints, coordinating her movements so as to land behind the fringe of yellowed grass. All that remain visible are her bare legs, thrust through the vegetation. THE YOUNG MAN emerges and stares down at them. He kneels, begins to trace his finger along the legs, then his tongue.

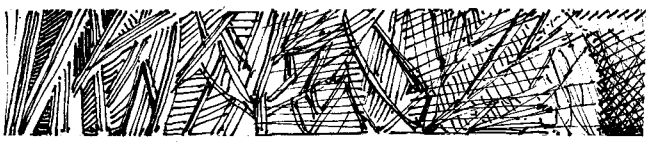
At that moment a piping is heard. THE YOUNG MAN, flustered and ashamed, leaps to his feet and spins about, looking for a place to secrete himself as the piping grows progressively louder. Finally he rushes for the boulder, stage front. He drops THE ELECTRIC TOASTER in his excitement, but manages to conceal himself before PAN enters, piping. PAN's hocks are shaggy and lewd, his twin horns bald and phallic. He clatters to the tree and scrambles up into the branches as THE SHEPHERD appears, leading a flock of crouching extras in woolly capes. THE SHEPHERD dodders along, trembling on his staff, the odor of sheepshit enveloping the stage, wafting out into the first rows. He pauses before THE BABY, shakes his head, tsks his tongue, and shuffles off. The wind begins to howl.

THE YOUNG MAN peers around the corner of the boulder, his back to THE AUDIENCE. He is about to step forward when THE MURDERER enters, stage left, heaving for breath. Like THE YOUNG MAN he too is dressed in alpine garb, though his shorts and blouse and lederhosen are ill-fitting—he looks like a black bear pinched into a boy scout uniform. He carries an axe in his hand, a sack of heads slung over his back. Noses, ears and chins can be seen protruding from the many rents in the sack's fabric. He sets his burden down and sniffs about the stage until he finds THE GIRL. He raises the axe. THE YOUNG MAN hesitates, does not fly to her aid. THE MURDERER's axe flashes like a mirror in the glare of the stage lights. His shoulders swell. But then a yodel sounds offstage right, and THE MURDERER lowers his axe with a craven sneer and slinks behind the cluster of snow-capped boulders.

THE DWARF enters from right, THE IDIOT in tow. A mountaineer's rope joins them. THE DWARF is balancing a stack of chairs on his back. THE IDIOT carries tea service for five, and a highchair. They proceed to set the table, THE IDIOT periodically blundering over the rope. THE GIRL wakes, shakes the grass splinters from her skirt, and sets THE BABY in the highchair before taking a seat at the table herself. Then PAN climbs down from the tree to join her, and THE YOUNG MAN steps from behind the rock and seats himself at her right. She smiles at THE YOUNG MAN. PAN pats her knee. THE DWARF sits and THE IDIOT pours the tea.

At the rear of the stage the lacquered rocks begin to quiver—and THE MURDERER stands, massive as an avalanche. The others ignore him, busying themselves with the tea things. He strides out and takes his place at the head of the table. THE BABY slaps a spoon on its saucer and rattles its cup. THE IDIOT crouches over THE TOASTER, stage center, working the lever, slavering into the coils. THE YOUNG MAN glares at THE MURDERER, righteous indignation in his eye. THE STAG bleeds. THE GIRL looks at THE YOUNG MAN. PAN looks at THE GIRL. THE DWARF looks at PAN. THE MURDERER glares at THE YOUNG MAN and opens his mouth to speak.

THE AUDIENCE leans forward.



T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE is a frequent contributor to NAR. He lives in Iowa City, where he is a fiction editor of the Iowa Review.

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W. Bradford Establishes Food Reserve

COUNCIL VOTES UNANIMOUSLY TO HOARD FOOD

10% OF ANNUAL BUDGET TO BE SET ASIDE EACH YEAR

CANNED AND DEHYDRATED GOODS WILL BE PURCHASED

Underground Storage Facility To Be Constructed

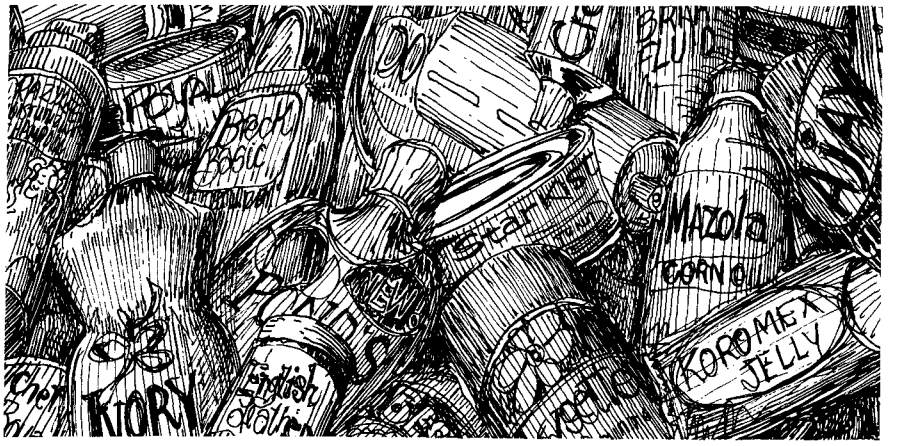
Special

WEST BRADFORD, CONN., Wed., July 8 — The Town Council of West Bradford last night approved an unprecedented plan to purchase thousands of dollars' worth of food supplies and store them for future consumption by town residents. "Even if we never have to distribute these goods," the Mayor pointed out shortly before the final vote was taken, "their value will increase tremendously as inflation skyrockets in the years ahead. It'll be like money in the bank, only much better."

The Council agreed to set aside 10 percent of its annual budget, or approximately $240,000 the first year, for purchasing foodstuffs. The question of whether to increase the percentage in future years was left open for the time being.

INCORPORATED into the resolution were measures for storing and guarding the expensive cache of survival items. A large underground warehouse is to be built in an as yet undetermined location. The sweeping resolution also charged the Police Commission with responsibility for "raising, training, and maintaining a volunteer militia of not less than 100 men for the purpose of protecting the storehouse." Councilman Peter Saundergaard, a resident of Butternut Lane in West Bradford, strongly supported this provision, stating that it would be irresponsible of the Council not to provide adequate security against "possible roving bands of starving citizens from neighboring towns, and especially the cities."

"If the federal government came in to take it away, though," joked the Mayor, "we probably couldn't deny them."



THREE-QUARTERS of a million dollars have been budgeted for construction of the storage facility and arming the volunteers. The resolution calls for immediate implementation of its programs. "The stepped-up timetable will necessitate not only curtailment of the school calendar, but also a substantial cut-back in library services," the Mayor pointed out. "At our next meeting I'll present detailed revisions of this year's budget," he went on, "which will enable us to get a jump on this thing."

There was some question as to the legality of revising the current budget without approval at a Town Meeting.

A FEW of the 14 townspeople who attended Tuesday night's Council meeting strongly urged the adoption of the resolution, which provides for the hiring of a Purchaser/Manager at an annual salary of $16,500, and two assistants, one at $9,200 and another at $6,400. West Bradford is "an equal opportunity employer," another Councilman, Mario Criscuolo, emphasized.

At least 10 minutes were spent discussing Paragraph 9 of the resolution, which establishes eligibility requirements under distribution conditions. A family of more than four persons (two adults and two children) would only be permitted to draw rations for four persons. Otherwise, Mr. Saundergaard pointed out, the Town Council and therefore the town might "be seen as condoning or encouraging large families, which at this time simply is not true. What we hope Paragraph 9 will encourage is sensible family planning." Furthermore, persons having a criminal record of any kind would be excluded from receiving the benefits of the program. "We have to draw the line somewhere," the Mayor explained. He went on to state that the Town Council's primary responsibility was to "those voters and taxpayers who will be called upon to support and contribute to this program over the years—the responsible members of society."

THERE WAS A QUESTION from the floor as to specifically what kind of food would be purchased (Italian, Kosher, or American). The Council did not rule on it. It was determined that such decisions would be the prerogative of the Purchaser/Manager. There was some disagreement on this. *–W. J. Holinger*

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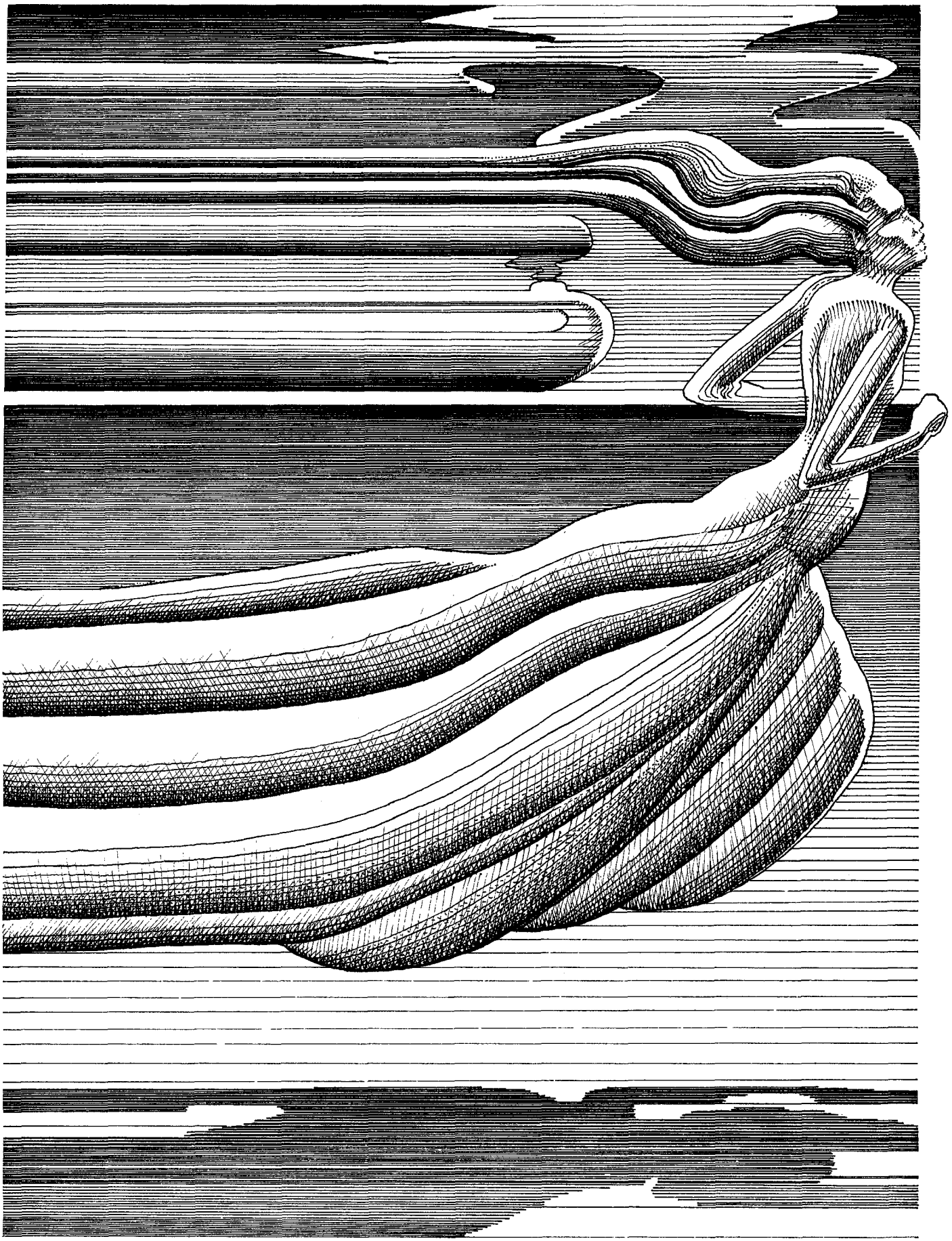

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Time Out of Mind

by Susan Harper

Every day, all through the late morning, they waited for the train—Sara William, Ronald and Kayleen, and usually Sammy Legg from down the street—playing in the dusty yards around Granny's house, swinging on the trapeze that Uncle Jason had rigged from one of the pecan trees when he was a boy, chasing the chickens that sometimes strayed over from Miss Lucy's.

Gradually the rising heat drained away their energy, and they stopped playing and squatted in the shade, mashing little green pecans between their fingers and talking, waiting for the train, the Georgia Central, which roared through Victory each noontime on its way to the peach sheds below town. Its coming was an event. Splitting the air with a rush of noise and power, stopping for nothing in this nothing town, it thundered down the main street of Victory, right past Granny's house; and it seemed to Sara William that it lifted them out of morning and bore them along for a minute before dropping them into the desert of a southern afternoon.

Now it was gone. Off in the distance she could hear it, iron brakes screaming against the wheels as it neared the peach sheds. The children had started talking again.

"But why was she *smiling?*" Ronald said. "Who ever heard of sitting in a room all by yourself, smiling at nothing?"

Sara William hung by her knees from a branch of Crazy Lucy's peach tree and examined her upside-down strands of hair. Ever since the party, it had been the same old thing, over and over. She shook her head from side to side, watching her hair fan out like string. It was awful hair, she thought, not even the right color, blonde or brown like everyone else's, just a terrible dull orange, the color of rust, or Georgia mud.

"And if she's sick, like your Mama said," Sammy Legg put in, "how come she wasn't in bed?" Bay-ud, he said. He lived down here, and his mama wouldn't tell him anything either.

Actually, Sara William thought, they might have gotten more out of Mama if it hadn't been for Granny. She remembered the day, the hot afternoon out of all the other hot afternoons, when they had sat in the kitchen, she and Mama and Granny, fanning themselves with cardboard fans that said Colquitt Funeral Home on one side and At Your Service in Victory on the other side. Sara William had read the words as the fan went back and forth, unable to stop reading, until she got dizzy and stopped fanning and put the fan under her chair.

There had been the explosive bang of the screen door out front, and the clatter of shoes over Granny's wooden floors, and Ronald and Kayleen had arrived in the kitchen—"Mama, Mama, you'll never guess what we saw!"—"I'm telling, I saw it first!"—Granny making them calm down and hush up for a minute, and Kayleen putting one foot on top of the other as if the secret were in her instep and could be clamped down by a shoe sole.

"All right, now," Mama had said with a sigh, "what is it?"

Kayleen's voice was high and clear. "The party was outdoors, see, but then I had to take Ronald to the bathroom. . . ."

"Did not, Miss Busybody," said Ronald. "I can go by myself. You just wanted to come too."

". . . and at first the nurse—Louisa has a nurse, see, and she was the one giving the party—at first the nurse didn't want to let us go in, only then she saw Ronald really needed to go."

"I really don't think . . ." said Mama.

"So then," Kayleen was adamant, her voice going higher and higher, "we started down the hall, only I noticed Ronald wasn't with me, he was staring in this door."

"I was not staring; I was just peeking."

"Ronald," said Mama, "we do not peek in doors at other people's houses."

SUSAN HARPER lives in San Francisco.

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"Well," Ronald said, "I thought it was the bathroom. It could have been the bathroom," he said.

"So I went back to get him, only then I saw, too. There was this lady sitting in there. Mama, you should have seen her; she looked just like my princess doll. She had yellow hair, and a beautiful golden dress on. And she was just sitting there, smiling, at nothing." Kayleen sounded breathless. "She never even saw us," she finished.

"Rebecca Rose," Mama had said softly. "Oh my Lord. . ."

But Granny had shot her a warning, silencing look. "What ever happened to the bathroom?" Granny asked.

"We, ah," said Kayleen, "we forgot. We got scared and ran out, and Ronald wet his pants."

"Mmm-*hmmm*," said Granny.

"It's your fault, too," Ronald yelled. "I didn't get scared."

"You big fibber, you were too scared!"

"Hush, you two," Granny said. "You'll wake up the baby. Now, tiptoe back and change out of those party clothes. We're goin' out to pick us some peaches after while."

"But Mama," Kayleen said, "who was she? That lady?"

Mama took a deep, reluctant breath. "She is Louisa's mother. And she is very sick." Her voice grew hard. "And I don't want to hear you talking about any of this, do you understand me? It's hard enough on a family, having the mother sick, without people peeking at her and going around talking about it. Now run on and change out of your clothes."

What *I* think," Kayleen said primly, smoothing her skirt, "is maybe Mama meant 'sick' in a different way." She cocked her head, looking down.

Sara William, still hanging by her knees, felt her shirt begin to slip upward towards her head, and she grabbed at it, pulling, trying to tuck it into her shorts, eyeing Kayleen narrowly through her strings of hair. Kayleen had an effortless childhood beauty that made people gasp; and she knew it. It was easy to see that her hair would never hang in strings, her nose would never grow to take up half her face. Sara William remembered Granny's voice: ". . . that awkward age, all legs and arms and nose, and not much else." She struggled with her shirt. "Not much else" was true. She had nothing worth hiding, but people seemed to think she did, or should, and they looked at her to see, or she thought they did; and this summer she had said, "Mama, when can I have a bra?"

"When you need one, Sara."

"But Mama, what if I take after Aunt Olivia, like with my hair?"

Mama had just laughed and laughed at that, while Sara William felt something like panic rising in her throat. "It's not funny," she had screamed, but still Mama had been laughing.

Now Ronald said, "Yeah. Maybe she meant sick in the head."

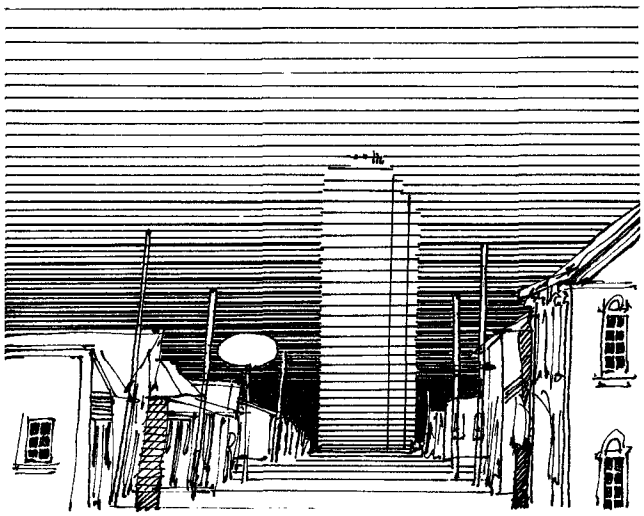
Sara William gave up on her shirt and came down out of the tree. "I think you're the ones sick in the head," she said furiously. "You think if you talk about it, and talk about it, and talk about it, you'll figure it out. Don't you know you're never going to figure it out?—and nobody's going to tell you, either, because you're just dumb little kids."

"Well, Miss Smarty," said Kayleen, "nobody's going to tell you either; and you weren't even at the party. You didn't even see her. Come on, Ronald, let's go make a clubhouse."

Sara William stood by the tree, watching them stalk away, thinking that Kayleen was like Granny, the way she somehow always came out on top. How did you get to be that way—were you born like that? Who am I like? she wondered.

"Sara William?" said Sammy Legg. She had forgotten he was there. "Sara William, do you really know about Louisa's mother and you're just not tellin'?"

Looking down, she kicked hatefully at Miss Lucy's spider-grass lawn. "If I did," she said, "if I did know, Sammy Legg, I certainly would not tell you."



2.

Sara William sat in the kitchen waiting for lunch—dinner, Granny called it—not because she wanted any, but because after they'd had it, it would be over.

Outside, a July-fly buzzed, a sound out of nowhere that soared upward in the heat, a rasping crescendo that ended nowhere, higher up. "High as a Georgia pine," she thought, hearing the sound go on and on, higher and higher, in her head. The whole summer had been like an illness.

Sighing, she watched the second hand on the clock above the refrigerator as it made the rounds of another minute. It all had something to do with time, she decided—all those quarter-hours and half-hours it took to fill up a day. Once they had all run together.

She closed her eyes and listened to the sounds of Mama cooking, to the baby babbling in the high chair, and thought about how beautiful Mama used to be, with her dark hair all sleeked back, and that look on her face, like she was all the time just on the verge of something. Now, especially since the baby, Mama's hair always seemed to hang in wisps around her ears, and her head was kind of bent over so that her neck looked knobby. It was as if whatever she'd been

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waiting for had come and gone while she was busy with something else.

"Sugar?" Granny bustled in, tying an apron over her broad front. "Sugar, you not going to the watermelon cuttin' this afternoon?"

Sara William shook her head, then shook it again, harder.

"Sara William!" Mama said sharply. Mama couldn't abide rudeness.

"No ma'am, I'm not going. They only invited me out of politeness—it's really for the little kids." She shook her head again. "Why does it do that—why does it hurt when you shake your head real hard?"

"Do you have a headache, Sara?" Mama eyed her with a worried frown.

"Child's bilious," Granny said flatly. "Peaked. Castor oil's what she needs—dose o' salts, my mama would have said."

Sara William stood up and began to set the table. "I am not bilious," she said, "and I do not need castor oil. I think I just rattled my brains, is all."

"Perhaps a little milk of magnesia. . . ," said Mama.

Sara William got out the ice and started pouring tea. The kitchen was hot; Mama had the stove turned way up, cooking cornbread—cornbread and greens, Sara William saw, and pineapple sandwiches. The tea bubbling over the ice cubes sounded delicious and cool as redemption.

"Sara," Mama said, "don't pour any tea for me. I believe I'll just have buttermilk."

Sara William shut her eyes, feeling the word invade her stomach. "Well then," she said finally, "you'll have to pour it yourself. I can't even stand to look at that stuff."

"Why, Sara *William!*" Mama cried.

"Why child," Granny said, "I'll declare. I do believe you *are* bilious."

Sara William slammed the tea pitcher onto the counter. "I am not bilious!" she screamed, running from the kitchen.

"Sara William's crying, Sara William's crying," Ronald sang as he went into lunch.

After lunch, it was Sara William's job to put the baby to sleep. "Now you children remember your manners," Mama was saying, "and don't ask for more of anything unless it's offered to you, Ronald."

Ronald scowled under his wetted-down hair. The cowlick in back stood straight up, defiant, not amenable to water; and anyone could see that by the time he got down the street, all the rest of his hair would do the same. Mama knew it too. She sighed.

"Dull!" Sara William wanted to scream. "You're all so dull!" She looked impatiently down at the baby in her lap, jiggling her. "C'mon. Drink."

Mama lay down on the sofa with a book, and Sara William leaned back against the slats of the rocker, feeling her head buzz with sleep or boredom.

She jumped. Mama's book had hit the floor. Her legs ached from sitting so still. She looked down at the baby, at the closed purplish eyelids, the open mouth neglecting the bottle. Rocking forward, she stood carefully up, unsticking her legs from the chair, and tiptoed back through the house. Carefully, gently, she rolled the baby into the crib, aware of a barely-contained violence in her somewhere, holding it in.

The whole house was full of breathing. In the front bedroom, Granny snored softly under a layer of newspaper which she always intended to read; her specs, eyeless now, hung from her ears to her chin, fogging and clearing and fogging again. The sheer curtains at the windows puffed in and out, slipping across the windowsills with a sigh.

Sara William felt as if she carried the weight of the afternoon on her head, warm and heavy. She looked at the clock: only one-thirty. Taking a dime from Granny's money-pot by the stove, she left a note on the kitchen table: 'Gone to the drugstore—S.W.'

The street outside was like a griddle. Cars droned by on singed tires—old cars, mostly, old black Chevrolets like Granny's, or high square Fords; and rusted-out pick-up trucks, their truck-beds full of children—coming to town for a Saturday afternoon.

In the dust and heat, everything seemed reduced to tiny particles of itself, all of it falling away in the distance. Sara William walked on down the street towards town, watching the town recede, while the sidewalk burned through the bottoms of her bare feet and glittered ahead like diamonds. She passed Crazy Lucy's house, and Miss Opal and Mr. Thermond on their porch—"Hey," she called. "Hey, Miss Opal. Hey, Mr. Thermond."

"Hey," said Miss Opal, and the word had an air of finality.

To show she hadn't meant to stop anyway, Sara William walked faster, looking down at the cracked and crazed old pavement where she must have broken her mother's back a thousand times. Only when she got to Cousin Becky's did she slow down.

The house stood well back from the street, half hidden by avenues of shade trees draped with Spanish moss. But anyone who gave a hard look could see that the house was gone to ruin.

"Lost her mind, poor thing," Mama had said.

"Mmm-hmmm," was Granny's comment, her eyebrows raised in disapproval. " 'Lay not up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust do corrupt.' "

Sara William had been to a wedding in that house. She remembered standing on a folding chair in the ballroom when she was five years old, facing backwards to watch the bride, Rebecca Rose, drift down the curving stairs, her glove sliding along the gleaming banister. Cousin Becky had been an old queen in dark velvet, her knotted fingers heavy with rings. After the wedding, she had sat in a huge chair in the front room to receive the guests, a nurse by her side—had reached one weighted hand to smooth Sara William's hair, murmuring to Mama. "Lovely."

"Tut," Granny had said, refusing to go to the wedding. "She's no older than I am. Confined to the house, my foot. Plumb wore out from all those years of doing nothing, that's all's wrong with her—too rich, too high and mighty, to lift a finger."

"But Mother, she can't help how she was brought up."

"Oh, I don't know. I brought you up, and here you are going off to that spectacle in Becky's ballroom."

Sara William ran a hand along the rusted iron fence, thinking of moths fluttering through the arched spaces where once a brain was housed.

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"Terrible, just pathetic," Mama had said after she called on Cousin Becky this summer.

"But why, Mama? I mean, if she's lost her mind, well, she doesn't know, does she?"

"Oh, I don't know," Mama said, bending her face forward into her hands. "To be so helpless. . . ."

"But if she doesn't know she's helpless. . . ."

"My grandmother was like that," Mama said. "And I think sometimes she knew. She would lie in bed for months, and then one day she'd get up and dressed and go off down the street. We had to go after her, and all the time she would pull away from us. 'I'm goin' home,' she'd say, over and over."

"Well," said Sara William, "maybe she meant home to the house she grew up in. Where was that?"

"Here," Mama said. "Right here."

Downtown Victory was hot and crowded. There were men everywhere, sitting on the curbs, on the bumpers of cars and trucks, men in blue-jean overalls, wiping their faces and necks with red handkerchiefs. They were hunched over, eyes on the ground, talking about the hardened-up furrows, the shrivelled-up corn, the government money they couldn't get; looking up at the sky that was hot and bright as sheet metal; beaten, blue-eyed, puzzled, waiting while the women bought their lard and flour and coffee, while the children spent their nickel apiece, while the afternoon cooled toward evening.

"Hey there, Miss Carpetbagger!"

Sara William stopped, hot with shame. "Why Jimmie Hendrick, you hush that!" said his mother. "Why, she's no more a Yankee than you are. She just has the misfortune of livin' up north. Ain't that right, Sara honey?" She smiled. "When yawl goin' home?"

"Day after tomorrow," said Sara William, trying not to sound glad.

"My, my, ain't that a shame. I know you just hate it." She flapped a hand. "Doesn't the time just fly?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Sara William.

"Well," said Mrs. Hendrick, flapping again, "you tell your Mama we're certainly goin' to miss yawl."

" 'Bye, Carpetbagger," hissed Jimmie.

Sara William bought a nickel Coke and five pieces of pink banana candy and walked home by the back way, resolved to wait out the afternoon sitting on Granny's kitchen steps. She wondered if there were any mean words to call a Southerner.

It was funny, Sara William thought, the way you heard things when you just sat and listened. Everything sounded so lonely. Even Crazy Lucy's whoops of laughter sounded like crying. But Sara William knew it was laughing; she must have just won another game of canasta. She and her boarder—a huge, burly man who went to work in the middle of the night and came home at noon—sat over there every afternoon and played Australia Canasta until supper-time. So Crazy Lucy wasn't lonely. She wasn't even crazy, and they weren't supposed to call her that—Mama had a fit when she heard it. "She's just a bit eccentric," Mama had said.

"What's 'eccentric'?" they had wanted to know.

"Well . . . odd. Unusual. You know."

So they had tried it out. Odd Lucy. Unusual Lucy. But it wasn't as good.

The baby was waking up. Sara William, sitting out behind the kitchen, could hear the beginning, sleepy attempts at crying—and that sounded sad, too. Babies didn't hesitate to disturb anything, Sara William thought; babies didn't hate to wake you up. It was sad because it was doomed. That baby, she thought, would spend the next ten years or so learning to tiptoe, and whisper, and be careful, and be afraid.

But maybe not. Kayleen hadn't learned to be afraid, much. Ronald neither. At least they were brave enough to peek in that door at Louisa's house, even if they did get scared afterwards. Maybe I got it all, Sara William thought, and they won't get any. It bothered her how she seemed to get all the bad things—Aunt Olivia's hair, and maybe her figure too; and Mama's worrying. And Daddy's broad shoulders, it looked like. Why couldn't she have gotten something else of his?—his smile, or the way he was always so happy. Could you choose what you wanted and sort of take it; or did it all just happen to you?

Mama was in the kitchen now, talking to the baby, hushing it, fixing a bottle. And Granny, in her mules, was slap-slapping across the linoleum to the refrigerator, saying, "Oh, law me! It is still as hot as blazes. I never have known a summer like it." Then, pouring herself some water from the water jar, "Reckon when we going to get some rain?"

Sara William crumbled the last piece of banana candy in her fingers, listening to Mama and Granny go on about how hot it was, and how the baby had heat rash only Mama was afraid it might be thrush. She leaned against the back of the house, wondering how many hours it was until they left Victory, wondering if it was less than a hundred. Then she heard Cousin Becky's name, and began to listen again. "Don't any of those children visit her?" Mama was saying.

"Well, you know, Harold's in Cleveland now; Eunice and her family are plumb out in Nebraska. . . ." Granny was creaking the rocking chair back and forth.

"And Rebecca Rose. . . ," said Mama.

"Oh, law, she's in no fit state for visiting anyone."

"She's no better, is she, Mother?"

"Better?" said Granny. "Why, there's no such thing, with opium. And those poor chillun—she doesn't even know who they are half the time, is what I hear, all doped up like that. It's the sins of the mothers being visited on the children, that's what it is."

Mama sighed. She was probably worrying about her own sins, Sara William guessed, that she was visiting on her children.

"It's time we were fetching those rascals home from the watermelon cuttin'." Granny's mules hit the floor. "You reckon that child of yours is still down at the drugstore?"

Sara William rose carefully from the back steps and crept around the side of the house, pausing behind the crepe myrtle bushes to try on the new secret once, quickly, squeezing her eyes into slits, trying to see the world of Victory through an opiate haze, imaging the golden lady behind the door—slant-eyed, yellow, wasted—puffing on a hookah, perhaps, and raising her eyebrows at Louisa, her throaty voice full of pauses: "Who . . . are . . . you?"

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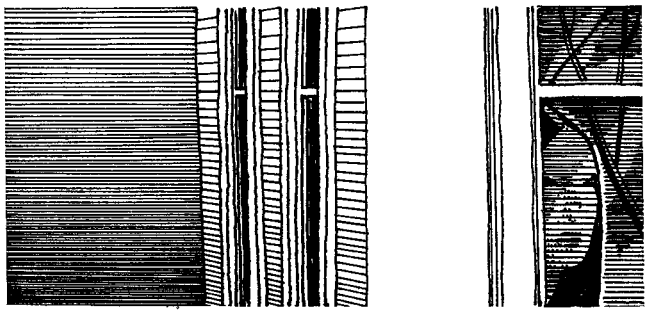

3.

Every night for the last six weeks, Sara William had climbed into bed saying aloud to herself, "Another day gotten through somehow." That made it official, like crossing off the numbers on a calendar: four more weeks to go, two-and-a-half weeks to go, now it was only two more days till they would board the train, two days after that till they were home. Home. Sara William thought she might possibly never leave it again.

Holding on to that thought, she would plunge her head into the pillow and concentrate on falling into instant sleep. But this night it wouldn't come.

She listened to the grown-ups droning on in the living room, and the crick-crack, crick-crack of Mama rocking the baby for the ten o'clock bottle. Kayleen groaned in her sleep, and there was the whine of a mosquito. Granny had no screens on the windows—she said curtains did as well, which maybe was pretty true; but one morning Sara William had been awakened by a loud buzzing, had seen a bee the size of a golf-ball, airborne by a miracle, dipping crazily toward her. Now she worried about it, wondering whether it was better to risk suffocation with your head under the sheets, or the sting of a giant bee. There was so much to be afraid of in this world.

Gradually the house got dark and quiet. The only sounds left were the trills of peepers and the sawing snores of Crazy Lucy's boarder, next door. There was no moon, and Granny never left a light burning anywhere, and Sara William worried about that, too. "What if," she thought, "I had to get up in the night, and couldn't find my way?"

She turned on her side and looked at the sky through the patterned sheer curtains at the window. Somewhere there was lightning, dim and far off—out in the country, probably, some farmer's fields were being pelted by a hard rain, the furrows becoming still streams. She watched the curtain, a pale haze like fog against the sky, its pattern of flocked fleur-de-lis little dark specks, bugs in a fine-grained web. Lit by lightning, for an instant they were white on paler white, shimmering, a bridal veil.

One decent day she'd had, in the whole summer: the day Aunt Olivia and Cousin Crystal came down from Macon. She and Crystal had sat on the back steps for hours, talking. Crystal was fifteen, and beautiful, and flatteringly matter-of-fact about the problems of dating, the difficulties of discouraging unwanted beaux. She seemed to take it for granted that if Sara William had not already faced these problems, well, it was just a matter of time.

Sara William had listened intently, absorbing the vocabulary, memorizing the attitude, finally—seeing the shadow of the roof beginning to stretch across the yard—blurting out her need for particulars.

"How come," she had asked, "your legs are so shiny?"

"Why, Sara William Ellis," Crystal had said, her perfect eyebrows arching, "I shave them. Don't you?" Then, bending over to look, "Would you like to? Come on, I'll show you how."

Breathless, she had stammered, "Does it hurt?"

Crystal had laughed. "No, silly. Come on!"

And so it had been accomplished, the two of them locked in the bathroom with a rusted razor from Uncle Jason's old chifferobe, and the bottle of baby oil out of Mama's room.

Afterwards, her legs were as lovely as Crystal's, and she rubbed them together or ran her hands down them for the cool feel like polished wood. She was sure the difference must show, but no one said a word. After Aunt Olivia and Crystal had gone, she paraded the length of the living room, sat down and crossed her legs, and at last said, "Notice anything different?" But no one did. "I've shaved my legs," she announced, and immediately knew it was the wrong thing.

"Oh, Sara William," Mama had breathed. "Why so soon?"

She looked now out the window, watching the lightning, no longer a dim glow, but white skeins unravelling across the sky. That was what they all said: "Why hurry? What's your rush? These are the happiest years of your life." She moved restlessly in the bed, terrified at the thought—what if they were right?

A whip of lightning cracked the sky; thunder rolled it shut. The massive clouds were boulders now, colliding with a sound of rock. The curtains whipped in and out, and the rain came suddenly fiercely down. Sara William waited for the padding fearful slipper-steps, hearing them before they arrived, Mama come to shut the windows.

Mama believed that lightning moved in ways predictable and pervasive. It travelled on air currents, and came in open windows or even down chimneys; but it also could be conducted by pipes, and come at you from the kitchen sink. It took skill and cunning to avoid being struck, according to Mama. Sara William's daddy laughed at all that, and had once taken Sara William out on the front steps at home, to watch a storm approaching and see how beautiful it was. They had stood, she in front, his hands on her shoulders, for a long time, safe from the rain under a little roof that overhung the steps; until Mama's voice came urgently from the shut house: "Bill? Bill!" A plea; a warning. Still they stayed, and Sara William had smiled up at the sky and at her father, and had shaken with terror.

The padding footsteps arrived, the windows were closed, the curtains dropped still against the panes. The room was close now, warm and damp, and Sara William breathed quietly while her Mama knelt and prayed first by her bed and then by Kayleen's. Dear Lord, preserve them. . . . She could hear dimly, through all the closed windows, the midnight freight rolling through Victory—could see it behind her eyelids, moving wet and black along the shining, rain-slick rails. □

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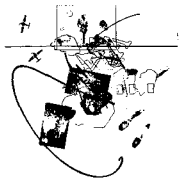

Lawrence Sturhahn

History of the Present

The Rev. Carl McIntire stands in the weed-choked field behind his L. Mendel Rivers Convention Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., and leads a tour of the future. "The Vietnamese village will be over to the left," says the fundamentalist New Jersey preacher, "and the Special Forces 'A' attachment camp will be to the right." Beside him, Giles Pace, a 31-year-old Chicago ironworker outfitted in camouflage fatigues and green beret, expands on the vision. "The village will be authentic," Pace promises. "Rice paddies, ducks, chickens, those animals with humps on their backs—what do you call them . . . ."

Newsweek-September 1975

REALITY

Edited down by the man himself, from his series of five 50-minute television programs (reported to be universally popular in Sweden), "Scenes from a Marriage" is Ingmar Bergman's film of last year. Exactly what the title describes—the views of a man and woman who are married at the onset, discover almost inadvertently that the union is unsatisfactory, do the internecine battle which ends in divorce, over the years continue to see each other (still attracted though both marry others), finally at the film's end are sexually involved again—almost the whole film is in close-ups.

Who now doesn't know that the film and video image are different? Leaving out the intricacies, that one is chemical (mechanical) and the other electronic, first it's a matter of size and atmosphere. In the dark theatre, more or less isolated from other patrons, for the viewer the screen is as big as the world and packed with detail.

Until that time when all of us have a home theatre, a wall-size screen, a color video projector, what's different is that we watch TV in a lighted room complete with all the distractions of home, and on that small screen the detail is mostly gone. The panoramic shot, the infinite gradations of focus, the muted colors, everything that can blow your mind in the theatre just does not resolve. What it does contain and present (maybe best) is the human face. That's so bad? Like a mirror of our face the screen is; the stories are (should be) obverse images of our lives. They should be real.

Of "Scenes from a Marriage," from *Sight & Sound* in the summer of 1973: "The style is even more close up than in his recent films, the faces of the actors are Bergman's dramatic landscape . . . ." His *recent* films . . . the luminous faces of "Cries and Whispers," that was Bergman's film of the year before last. And this year, it's "The Magic Flute."

"Scenes from a Marriage's" field of view, narrow enough to start, narrows further as the film progresses. It seems as if only the two of them—the man and woman—are on the screen. Photographed in 16 mm by Sven Nykvist (Bergman's cameraman), the camera watches the two actors straight on, face to face, and flat out against the walls of small rooms. Office—kitchen—bedroom: their world, a *world*!

So, some say, it's limiting, the video image in this film. I see the fusion of form and content. My sensibility is that that was Bergman's design, and to make it most concrete he presents this plain, tight, intense look. And the two of them, Liv Ullman and Erland Josephson, are fantastic to watch.

Alan Casty in his book, *Development of the Film*, speaking of "Persona"(released in 1966):

> "At the conclusion of the opening montage of strong film images that suggest—and mock, when some frames sputter and burn—the sensory power, the surface impact of the motion picture, a boy reaches up, troubled, groping to touch, to get beyond, to get through the surface of the giant close-up of a woman's face that appears on the white wall of the room. In the rest of the film, Bergman attempts to find cinematic devices to get beyond the surface 'seeming' to the nuances of 'being' . . . it is the summation of his attempt—so characteristic of contemporary directors—to use the realistic surfaces of the film image, especially its reflection of the human face, to get at the deeper more intangible kinds of reality that lie beyond . . . . The nature of the reality beyond and the nature of the devices to get at it have varied in a meaningful pattern through the major phase of Bergman's career . . . ."

At the end of "Scenes . . ." they are in bed together, twenty years have passed, and he says to her: "but here I sit with my arms around you, without any fuss, in the middle of the night in a dark house, somewhere in the world. And your arms are around me. I can't honestly say I have any great insight or fellow-feeling."

But the audience does. It's the triumph of the film. Our concern, the man says, should be with people. The *events* numb us. In spite of what we do to each other—the pain inflicted, the loneliness invoked, the dues paid—if we work at life we endure. It's what Faulkner said; it's the triumph of man.

Bergman once said of Luis Buñuel, that *he* said "something wonderful" when asked for whom he made his films. " 'I make them for myself and for my friends and for some friends of my friends.' "

Of Bergman, it is said that he travels the same road to the studio each day, so he will not be distracted from his creative effort. He wants no new experiences when he's making a movie.

II

Hans Mast, economic adviser to the powerful Credit Suisse, *tries to explain just how much wealth the oil producers will soon have. If they decide to buy stocks on Wall Street, he calculates, in seven or eight years they would have enough money to buy every share quoted there. At today's prices, that would add up to—take a deep breath—$650 billion . . . . Swiss bankers are solid citizens. They work in huge, old, ugly buildings—the richest of them are on Zurich's bustling* Paradeplatz *and, imperturbably, they observe the world with its*

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wars, revolutions, and foibles. They are still cool, but they also seem divided on how to deal with this economic calamity . . . . One of them describes the incredible happenings of the past 12 months as the greatest economic upheaval since the industrial revolution 200 years ago. In these two centuries, the industrial states have been creditors to the rest of the world. Now, suddenly, they have become desperate debtors . . . . And most men alive, from Tokyo to Turin to Calcutta, have acquired a crushing debt to the distant sheiks in tiny states named Abu Dhabu or Kuwait or the Arab Emirates . . .

Mark Gayn: *Toronto Star 1974*

YAHOO

"Black Christmas," produced and directed by Bob Clark, stars: Olivia Hussey, Keir Dullea (I think of him as *The Astronaut*), Margot Kidder, Marian Waldman, and John Saxon as Lt. Fuller. Some names in the cast, a nice paradox in the title that sets up some interesting juxtapositions in my mind, there's a *gothic* opening, a shot of a grand mansion, under which, on the sound track, there's heavy breathing. As a film should, melodramatic as it is, the opening hooks the audience, and cues them to punch up their visual circuits with the way to see the film. Something is wrong, though . . . .

The release from Warner Brothers Studio, Burbank, California, contains the cast and credits, a synopsis. "Christmas and the end of a semester are being celebrated by the girls of a sorority house in the small college town of Bedford. During the noisy festivites, a clumsy, heavy breathing stranger enters and makes his way up to the unused attic."

The second paragraph starts: "A feeling of terror settles over the girls as a telephone caller ends his obscenities with a death threat . . . ." *Cunt* and *fat cock* are among the words that the audience listens to the heavy-breathing caller speak.

"You fucking creep!" the sorority girl says.

"I'm going to kill you!" the caller groans.

I can't remember (nor is it in my notes) whether this particular girl is among the five people who are quite graphically killed—suffocated with a plastic bag—garroted with a hook hung on a block and falls—stabbed with the phallic horn of a unicorn made of glass. I do remember the housemother, a blowsy, drunken, silly woman who smokes with a cigarette holder and babies a fuzzy white cat; the hook in her neck, she dangles from the falls. Unpleasant character, her passing was no loss. She's like no housemother I ever saw, nor is the house she oversees.

This unreality in the film, the slickness of the *mise en scene* raises the first doubts. Then the shock of the obscenities coming over the phone. Puritanical about explicit language (or explicit images) I am not, except when—to exploit the audience—they are false. In my notes I wrote: *I wonder if there will be skin, or only dirty words. . . .*

In the comfortable preview theatre the highback seat rocks gently back under my weight, and the screen is close; I wrote things down as the "Black Christmas" unspooled: ". . . interesting detail on the death with the plastic bag—the cellophane sucked into the mouth as dying girl gasps for air . . ." ". . .Santa Claus and shit & fuck posters on the walls of Clare's room . . ." ". . . how would this sound in a college audience . . ?" ". . . to the stone faced *Astronaut* she says, 'I'm pregnant!"—as a stone, he responds . . ." ". . . a student at the conservatory for eight years, a prodigy, the *Astronaut* is not happy—he has to line up behind six people to get a bath, so he wants to quit the whole thing and get married . . ." ". . . he breaks a piano into matchsticks to show emotion . . ." ". . . the skin—a sorority sister on the couch with *Playboy* opened to the centerfold . . ." ". . . cops don't have a man available to check out the

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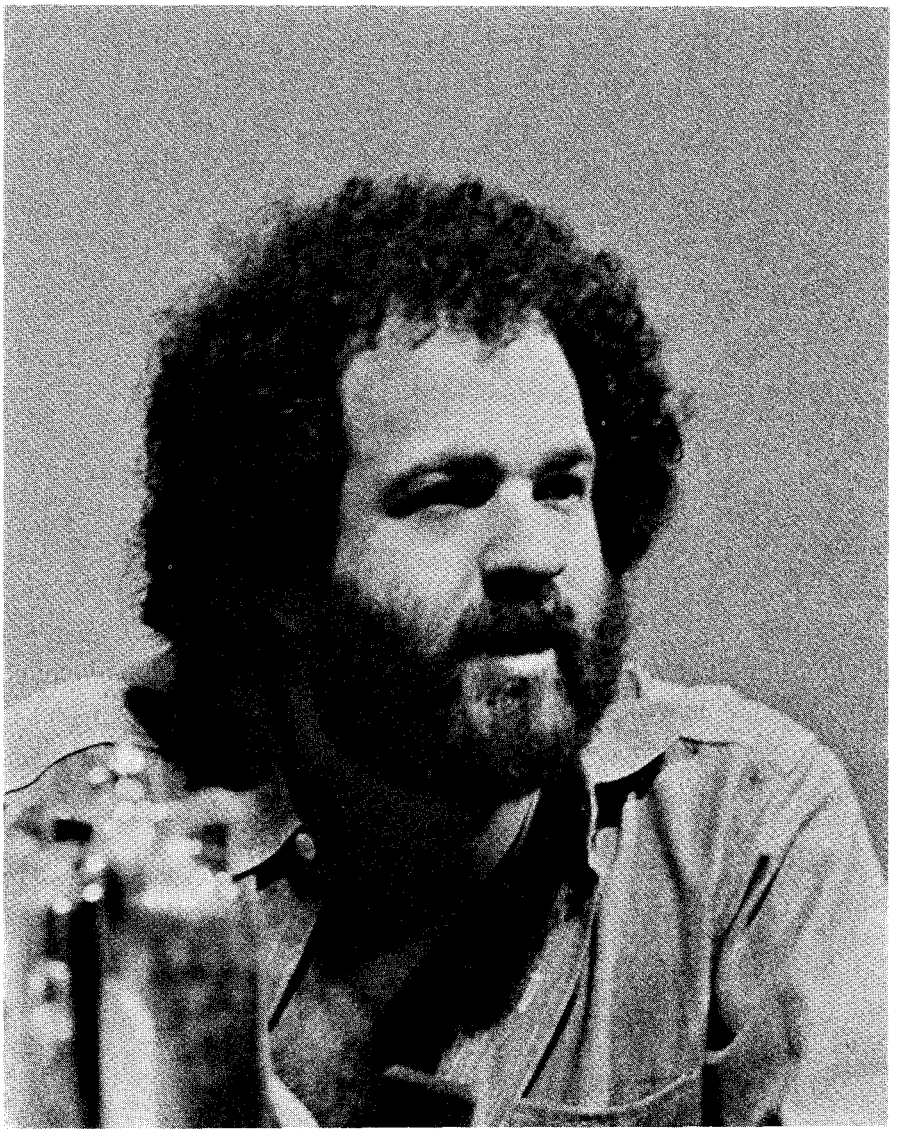
phone—they're *that* busy—?" ". . . Jennings, a cop, is number four—his throat cut from ear to ear. . ." "horror film rhetoric: a *place* of menace (in this film the attic where the unseen killer hangs out; in "Jaws" it was the ocean), and each time the film cuts to the visual motif that's been established the conditioned audience feels the conditioned emotion, and waits suspended for *it* to happen; all it takes to set up the response is the cut—interesting . . ." ". . . the little bugger is snockered . . ." ". . . Barbara turns out to be asthmatic . . ." ". . . the carolers are singing outside, intercut with the killing inside . . ." ". . . the sharp glass horn plunging up and down, the penetrated flesh below the frame line, the horn more and more bloody with each thrust . . ." ". . . plot carefully manipulated to leave the girl, Jess, sick and alone in the house at the end—improbabilities and improbabilities—when maybe he wasn't the killer after all, and the phone (another terror rhetoric) starts ringing . . ."

Subjected to a simplistic story, so full of plot holes that it's blown ten minutes into the film, peopled with unpleasant caricatures, assaulted by four-letter scatological words which have no organic function in the experience of the film, certainly I'm not the audience "Black Christmas" was made for. So—what audience is it, and what experience will that audience carry away?



Except for some interesting rhetorical details there's nothing here deeper than the surface, and even if "Black Christmas" was no blockbuster there are many such almost unheard of films released each year. Shown in small theatres, in drive-ins, away from sophisticated big city markets, in San Francisco, and New York, and Des Moines these films are hard to find. But, perhaps, as it's necessary not only to understand Puritanism, and spend time living in and feeling out the Middle West which is the heartland of the United States, so to know our country, our America, these pictures need to be seen also. Because if there wasn't an audience they wouldn't be made.

In a column, published in the calendar year of 1975, George Will wrote:

> "For millennia, per capita income did not change much. But for 200 years—an historical blink—per capita income has rapidly increased, as has discontent . . . . The great economic—and political—fact of modern times is that consumption inflames rather than slakes appetites. Lincoln knew, who didn't want all the land in the world, 'just all that borders mine'. . . . One source of modern economic dynamism is the sense of relative deprivation. Modern man wants to keep up with the Joneses not just so he can sprint past them in the home stretch, but also so he will not sink to living conditions which would have pleased an 18th Century German prince . . . . In 1974, 7.3 million (13.1 percent) of America's 55.7 million families earned less than $5000—the poverty line for a non-farm family of four. But 12.7 million (22.7 percent) earned between $5000 and $10,000 and 13.6 million (24.4 percent) earned between $10,000 and $15,000. And the largest number of families—15.8 million (28.3 percent)—were in the $15,000—$25,000 category. Only 700,000 families (1 percent) earned more than $50,000."

Recently I read—encased in other criticism of the presentation of news on television—of the proliferation of the *non-event* story (President Ford in Vail). And how much can you get out about Angola in two minutes? And what other source do the majority of our countrypersons have for information about the world they inhabit in what is/was the richest and most powerful country? Theoretically, in this democracy, each vote cast (or not cast) for president in the coming fall of this bi-centennial year affects—eventually—every other person in the world. And how much does this individual voter know of the complexities of the world?

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"Black Christmas" is to be examined for clues in what it shows. Its surface, reflecting our surface, is simplistic, violent, titillating, and, paradoxically, this is unreal and real—both! In the world, terrorism, internecine war, exploitation, sham, they pullulate.

III

Eight out of ten Americans between the ages of 25 and 36 cannot balance a checkbook, and nearly half are unable to fill out a simple income tax form without making a mistake. Men are better comparison shoppers than women, who tend to think that largest food packages are automatically the most economical. Given the dimensions of a carpet in feet and its price per square yard, only two out of five young adults can compute the carpet's cost. And only 41 percent of nation's 17-year-olds can solve the following elementary percentage problem: "Candidate A received 70 percent of the votes cast in the election. If 4,200 votes were cast in the election how many votes did he receive?" . . . . Since 1969, researchers have been testing and retesting hundreds of thousands of Americans at four age levels—9,13,17 and 25-36. . . . The results to date have been mixed. Although the reading tests turned up many deficiencies, the national results were actually slightly higher than the experts had expected. The literature assessment showed that "young Americans are remarkably avid readers," with more than nine out of every ten respondents between the ages of 15 and 36 reporting that they read regularly, particularly novels and biographies. Their troubles with reading skills showed up, however, when they were asked to discuss the books. Many could only retell the stories in the most literal way . . . . On every assessment but two—science and consumer math—females outperformed males over-all. Among the adults, however, men did better than women, whose performance appeared to plummet once they left school.

Newsweek-August 1975

AMERIKA

"Katherine," a feature length film made for television, was aired early in October of 1975, shortly after Patricia Hearst, Bill and Emily Harris, Wendy Yoshimura were apprehended in San Francisco, and shortly before the theatrical version—slightly more naked and overt in language—was screened at the 19th Annual San Francisco Film Festival. Written and directed by Jeremy Paul Kagan (who said that it was "a movie about a number of years . . .") in many areas it came close to being the most provocative, and excellent film I saw all year.

"We have defined a story as narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence," E. M. Forster writes in the classic *Aspects of the Novel*. "A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The king died, and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief ' is a plot. The time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it . . . . Consider the death of the queen. If it is in a story we say 'and then'. If it is in a plot we ask 'why?' "

The radicalization of a young Upper-Middleclass American woman is the story of "Katherine." Taking place in time, from 1965 to 1970 or '71, it is also an historical record of the cataclysmic rise and fall of the Counter Culture, and its ancillary political arms. The concept that love and good feelings and looking-in-the-eye would face the establishment with its oppression and fear and, by these tokens, affect the change that the radicals thought their country needed, foundered on the rocks they had rightfully acccused the establishment of having in its harbors. And the heavy iron was on the establishment's side; against tanks rocks only bounce. Battles were lost and blood was spilled and property was destroyed, and finally that war ended, and the days of these years started. Altamont was a sign; Cambodia was the

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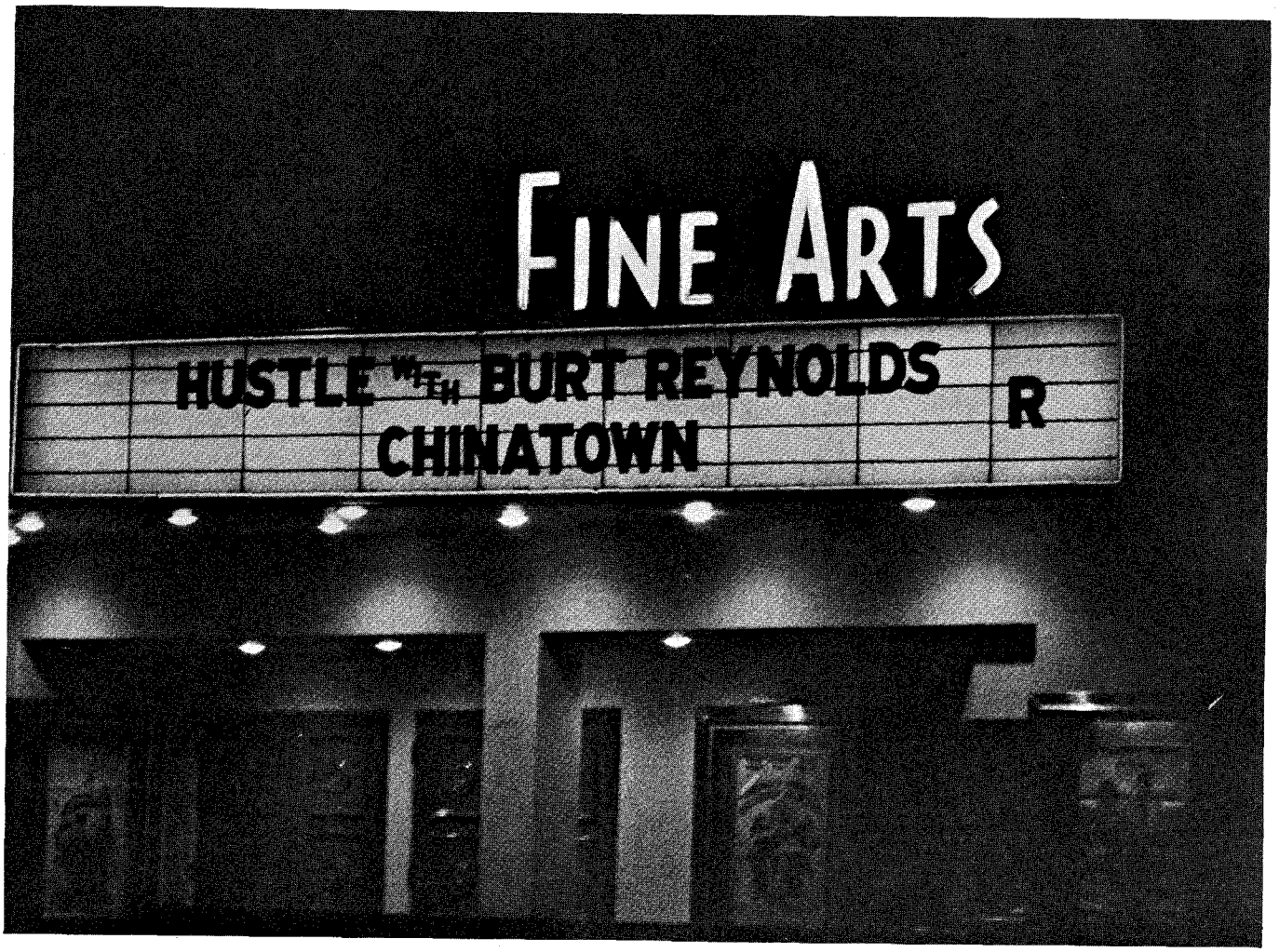

death knell. And the irony is that the time when the walls of the palace were finally pulled tumbling down was years after the long hairs blew the horn. Unremarked as the vindication was, it was also too late.

There is a tactical difference between the acts of sabotage—directed against property (the mode of the '60s), and terrorism—directed against people—which is what we have now. Katherine, a revolutionary, was performing the former when the bomb she was carrying either went off too early, or she was too late, or she was assassinated.

Kagan is asked if her death didn't indicate a pessimistic view, herself a victim of her own illusions. Muttering to himself whether or not that wasn't true for all of us, he answers that he wanted to make the point of where he was at. In fact the acts of sabotage, performed by the Weathermen and others, were not successful enough, did not force the attention of the masses of Americans to that which needed to be brought out. "It was not a prairie fire, but a spark from a match that went out."

Details surround the persons in Kagan's images, the *mise en scene*, chairs—tables—walls—trees—space, *detail* . . . fills in the visual hunger in man and automatically, if authentic, creates the metaphor.

Forster speaks of causality; so, everything in those years was both a cause and an effect. To see it altogether is the treat that Kagan has pulled off. The film, sectioned into years (introducing each, a visual montage of newsreels, two presidents mouthing platitudes and lies, and the magnificent songs of that great musical time), acting as motif for what follows, the events of Katherine's life. Her trip touches all the stations from liberal kid to dead radical.

One time in a ghetto alternative school, as blacks became more nationalistic, there's a confrontation, the hard-faced brothers sit across the table from her. *They say until she learn how to die she was never on the case*. At the end of the film she has learned; her dues are paid. To be even up, turkey, that's square.

And all of this comes in the form of a long flashback, from the time when Katherine, carrying the bomb, leaves the house and travels towards the place where she will plant it. Along the way the audience is shown the who—what—when—where—how of her; the picture is very clear. And conventional: wealthy, educated, politically conservative parents can produce educated liberal children. But into the pot in those years went self-expression, romanticism, self-indulgence, humanitarianism, ecological awareness, and the consciousness raising catalysts of drugs, feeling, and pure idea.

They speak today, as the truths are revealed (corruption in business, dirty tricks in the law enforcement and intelligence sectors, legions of lawyers with stained escutcheons, the shadows over Camelot), of law and order again. It was the permissive years that created the terrorists of today . . . . Or have we not what we created, our very own monster? Is it possible that, quietly and more efficiently, and infinitely more brutal, it is going on? What are the portents for the future? There was a bombing in the Bay Area last night, and one the night before, and last week, and. . . . □

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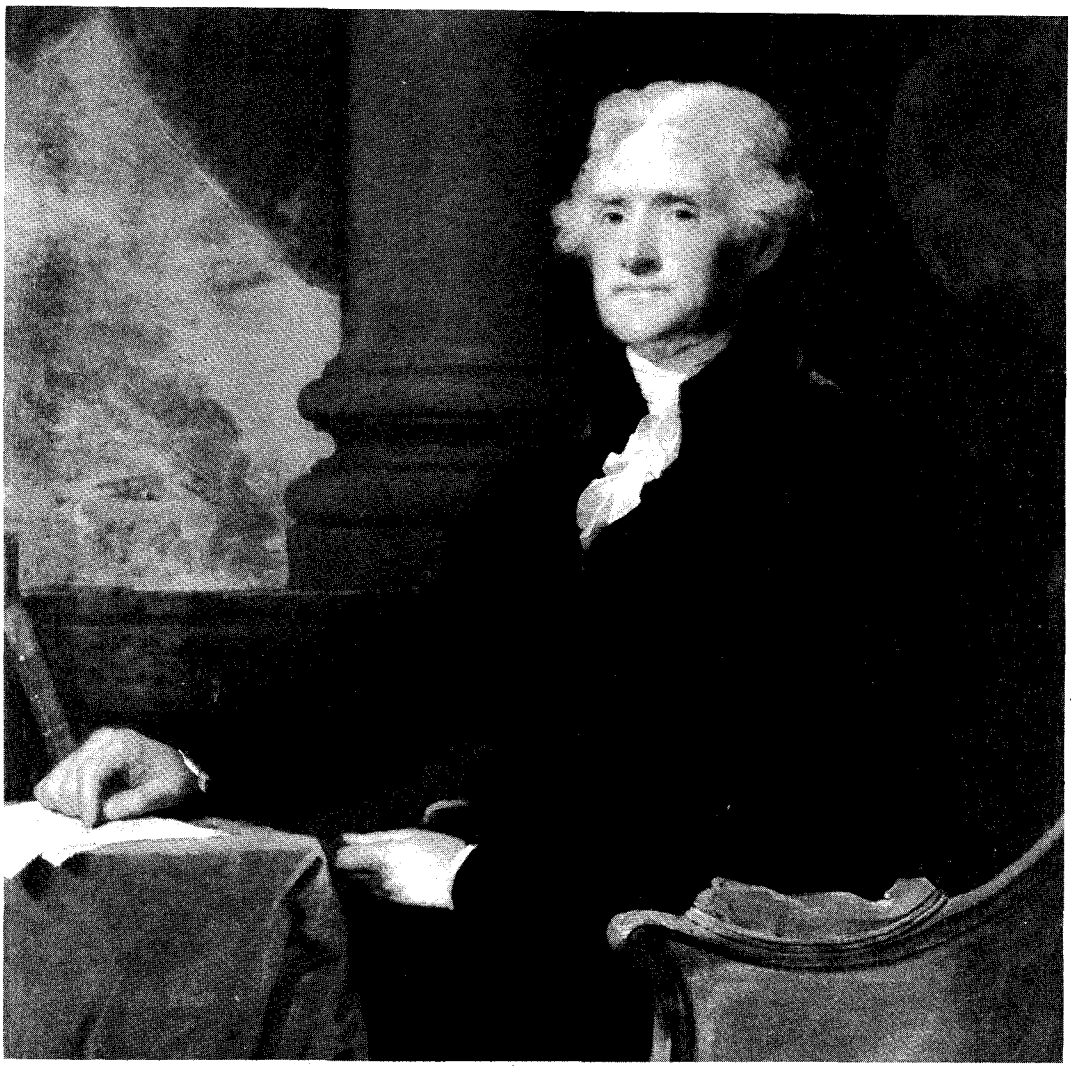

Sir Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

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Th: J

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